DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 273 791 CE 044 968

AUTHOR	Bagley, Bill; Challis, Bob
TITLE	Inside Open Learning. Studies in Further Education.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Staff Coll., Blagdon (England).
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-907659-37-3
PUB DATE	85
NOTE	87p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Attitudes; *Administrator Role; *Adult Education; *College Programs; Educational Objectives; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Nontraditional Education; *Open Education; Postsecondary Education; *Program Development; Staff Development; Student Attitudes; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Participation; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS	*Great Britain

ABSTRACT

A study examined the experience of teachers, students, and college administrators in the following three open learning schemes for adult students in Great Britain: Flexistudy at Abraham Moss Open College, the mathematics and communications workshops at Bradford College, and the Technical Education Council programs at Moston College of Further Education. The satisfactions and dissatisfactions expressed by the teachers involved in the programs could be grouped into the following five clusters: becoming involved, controlling knowledge, dealing with the complexity of the method, addressing the complexity of the role, and handling the personal distance inherent in the programs. Starting open learning schemes, involving staff, providing administrative support, determining staffing schemes, accounting for resources, and determining the location of an open learning scheme within the structure of a given college were all seen as issues of open learning programs that are of particular concern for college administrators. The comments that the teachers and administrators provided with respect to these issues were used as the basis for formulating a series of questions for teachers and administrators planning to develop open learning programs. (This report ends with lists of questions for teachers and administrators. The questions for teachers address various aspects of getting and being involved in open learning schemes, and those for administrators deal with purpose and motive procedures for setting up a program, staff and staff development, management information, and future development.) (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Studies in Further Education

Inside Open Learning

By Bill Bagley and Bob Challis

ED273791

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

CE 044 968

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

P Rawlings

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ISSN 0268-5817 ISBN 0-907659-37-3

© The Further Education Staff College 1985.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Published by The Further Education Staff College
Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG
Telephone (0761) 62503

Typesetting by Avonset, Midsomer Norton, Bath
Produced by Colourways, Clevedon, Bristol
Printed in England

CONTENTS

Preface and acknowledgements		1
Part I:	**Introduction**	3
	Chapter 1 The nature of open learning	4
	Chapter 2 The project and this report	6
Part II:	**The open learning schemes**	9
	Chapter 3 Flexistudy at Abraham Moss Open College	10
	Chapter 4 The Mathematics and Communications Workshops at Bradford College	20
	Chapter 5 TEC programmes at Moston College of Further Education	38
Part III:	**Cross-centre issues**	53
	Chapter 6 Issues for teachers	54
	Chapter 7 Issues for college managers	69
Part IV:	**Conclusions**	76
	Chapter 8 Questions for teachers	77
	Chapter 9 Questions for college managers	79
References		82

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Bill Bagley graduated in history and joined the Education Branch of the Royal Air Force in which he served in a wide range of educational and training appointments. On leaving the RAF after 16 years, he joined the staff of Peterborough Technical College, where ultimately he was responsible for the establishment of its Educational Services Unit. This unit organised all open learning and support services (print, AV, library) across the college and was responsible for curriculum and in-service development. In 1975-76, he was seconded to the MA course in Curriculum Development at Sussex University where he and Bob Challis first met. Mr Bagley is now the Assistant Principal for Research and Development at North Manchester College where he is still heavily involved in open learning development.

Bob Challis graduated in philosophy and mathematics in 1968 and joined the circuit of part-time teaching in Birmingham, where he taught college, polytechnic and university students. He later worked at Loughborough Technical College and in the Educational Development Unit of Ealing College of Higher Education. In 1976 he was awarded the University of Sussex MA in curriculum development. He joined the Further Education Staff College in 1978 where he worked on a number of research and development projects in curriculum policy and evaluation and local authority planning and management. In 1985 he became Senior Inspector (Post-14 Education) with Somerset Local Education Authority. Other recent publications include **The management of curriculum change** (with T J Russell) and **YTS and the local authority** (with C Mason & D L Parkes).

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is the report of a research project, **The experience of open learning,** funded by the Further Education Unit, which investigated the experience of teachers, students and college managers in three open learning schemes in further education. It is intended particularly for FE staff who are already running an open learning scheme or who are thinking of setting one up.

This report is neither a promotional document nor an administrator's guide – publications of both kinds are already available in some numbers and, indeed, there is a certain view in FE that more such reports have been published on open learning than students have been taught by means of it. Instead the project set out to gather evidence systematically on what it is actually like to study and work on an open learning scheme: how and why the schemes were set up, what dilemmas were experienced by staff, what strategies were adopted by students. No precise recommendations are put forward in this report on how open learning schemes should be tutored or managed. The experience of a small number of colleges would not justify such recommendations, and, in any case, such generalised advice can be difficult to follow in particular circumstances. What we offer is an analytic account of the range of experience and practice of the schemes' participants so that the reader can gain some insights into the operation of open learning schemes and the difficulties and satisfactions which they can create.

The bulk of the project field work was carried out during 1982. Since then there have been at least two developments in open learning which have given a sharper point to the project findings. One is the Open Tech initiative, which has given greater legitimacy to open learning generally by its sizeable budget and by its emphasis on mainstream vocational FE. The Open Tech has also raised questions about the responsiveness of FE colleges, both externally, as a result of MSC publicity, and internally, if Open Tech work has been found to fit uneasily in conventional forms of college organisation and management. Colleges now take open learning more seriously than they did in earlier days, when it could seem to be a bizarre activity of an eccentric or careerist minority.

The Open Tech programme is designed to influence the effective availability of courses, not necessarily their aims and content. However important, it is a conventional promotion of open learning. The other significant – and more radical – development since 1982 is the steady shift in curriculum content from subject matter to process skills – ideas such as 'learning to learn', 'problem-solving' and 'transferable skills' are now widespread as a result of YTS, CPVE and other pre-vocational

schemes. With such objectives it has become quickly apparent that didactic class-based teaching is rarely effective and must often give way to student-centred teaching, resource-based learning, negotiated curricula, etc., all of which can be seen as forms of open learning in its broader sense. Open learning may be in progress even where the term itself is not in use. For all developments, conventional or unorthodox, we hope that the findings reported here will provide some necessary illumination.

* * * * *

We have a number of important acknowledgements to make. Firstly, the project benefited from the advice of the Flexible Learning Opportunities Study Group of the FEU. Secondly, we are grateful to the students in the three open learning schemes for giving up their time to discuss their experience. Finally, we are particularly grateful to the staff of the three institutions for the many ways in which they helped us, and notably for the unrestricted access which they gave us to people and papers and for their willingness to discuss their schemes with us.

We are grateful also to the Further Education Unit for permission for us to publish this complete report. A summary of the report, entitled **The experience of open learning**, has been published by Longmans on behalf of the FEU.

Bill Bagley
Assistant Principal (Research & Development)
North Manchester College

Bob Challis
Staff Tutor
Further Education Staff College
August 1985

PART I: INTRODUCTION

This part of the report consists of two sections:

Chapter 1 **The nature of open learning**
Chapter 2 **The project and this report**

The first section gives a brief overview of open learning, its various forms and its recent development. The purpose is to place in context the project, 'The experience of open learning', of which this is the report. The project itself is the major topic of the second section: the aims, the approach, and what was done. The section concludes with a statement on the purpose and structure of this report.

The nature of open learning

One of the most widely used definitions of open learning is still that put forward by the Council for Educational Technology in a 1980 consultative paper.

'An open learning system is one which enables individuals to take part in programmes of study of their choice no matter where they live or whatever their circumstances.' (CET, 1980, para 1.2)

The common aim of all forms of open learning is 'that of freeing courses of study and training from the constraints that prevent their effective availability' (MSC, 1981, p.6) and the constraints from which courses may commonly be freed include time and place of study, starting dates and duration, entry requirements, limited availability, and a limited range of learning methods.

Although the number of students in open learning schemes is small when compared with those following traditional further education courses, the increase in numbers over the last ten years has been rapid. An awareness of the 'missed' population of potential students (unable to attend traditional courses), a decline in recruitment to traditional courses, the successful example of the Open University, government initiatives such as the Open Tech – all these factors, and others, may be called upon to explain the growth of open learning in FE.

The schemes take different forms. To use the terms defined by the Council for Educational Technology (CET, 1980) some of the schemes which have been developed are **college based systems**, where all the teaching is done in the college but where students are able to study in the college at a time and pace of their own choice; some are **local systems**, where most of the students live within travelling distance of the college but spend part of their study time at home; and a few are **distant systems**, in which the students live at some distance from the college and, in effect, pursue correspondence courses. (Open learning is often treated as synonymous with distance learning – a use of the term which can prove confusing and obstructive.)

Nearly all these schemes, however, are 'open' only in the sense that the student has some control over how, where and when to study. As an FEU publication points out (FEU, 1983) they leave untouched the other possible areas of openness (or 'flexibility' in the FEU's broader term): aims and content, entry requirements, assessment methods. Most current open

learning schemes, for a variety of strong reasons, relax only a few constraints.

Even such modest openness (as compared with what is possible in principle) can nevertheless produce new problems and opportunities for the staff and students experiencing it. Students may find that there is no coherent class group and that they are expected to spend much of their time learning from printed materials or from unorthodox tutorial arrangements. Staff may discover the need for a more varied role or for a changed relationship with their students. It was those experiences which the project, reported here, was designed to investigate.

Chapter 2

The project and this report

The project, in outline, was an investigation of open learning schemes at three centres. The aim was to explore the experience of the teachers, students and college managers who were involved in the schemes, in order to identify the range of problems, responses and strategies and to relate them to the schemes' institutional contexts. We wanted to learn about the problems and pleasures of studying or working in an open learning scheme, and we wanted to know why they occurred. We should emphasise that the project was not an evaluation in any conventional sense, and that this is not an evaluation report.

THE PROJECT APPROACH

The project was an intensive investigation of a small number of centres. The intention was not to discover which proportion of the participants (teachers, students, managers) held what views about open learning, i.e. it was not a survey; the aim, instead, was to trace and interpret the complexities of participant experience. For that reason it was important that the schemes to be studied should differ from each other in certain important ways if the possible **range** of experience was to be identified. The schemes which were eventually chosen varied by type (college-based or local only, since distance schemes were likely to remain a small minority); by apparent degree of vocational relevance; by type of student (age, educational background, etc.); by origin of learning materials; and by emphasis on external awards. It was also thought important that all the schemes should have been in operation for at least two years, and with more than just a handful of students.

These were the schemes which were studied:

- Flexistudy at Abraham Moss Open College[1], Manchester;
- Mathematics Workshop, Tutor Teach and (to a lesser extent) the Communications Workshop at Bradford College;
- TEC programmes at Moston College of Further Education[1],

1 These two colleges actually merged in September 1982 to form North Manchester College. Since the bulk of the field work was carried out before then and, in any case, the schemes retained their identity in the period immediately following the merger, the two institutions are treated as separate in this report and referred to by their original names.

Manchester.

The research techniques used were related to the nature of the project: analysis of records and other documents; interviews with teachers, students and managers; observation of tutorial and other activity. The field work was spread over a period of 15 months from December 1981, a budgeted average of nine days being spent at each centre. In each scheme we interviewed, often several times, all the staff who had a significant involvement in the open learning courses, and also between ten and 15 students or groups of students, chosen to produce a likely spread of responses and outlooks. Another six students in one scheme were interviewed over the telephone. Whenever possible the interviews were tape-recorded.

The methodology was a limited form of participant observation, similar to the condensed fieldwork of some of the recent forms of case-study research (e.g. Norris 1977, Simons 1980), and the research proceeded by a progressive focusing on certain emergent issues (analysed in Parts II and III of this report). As is usual with this type of research, the interpretations of participant experience suggested by one set of data were cross-checked, whenever possible, against another set, and at times we have made the process clear in the text.

THIS REPORT

It will be clear from the preceding paragraphs that it was not the kind of project which could led to a set of precise and substantiated recommendations on how open learning schemes should be set up, tutored and managed. Our conclusions — Part IV of this report — take the form of questions rather than solutions. The purpose of the report is to inform the reader's own judgement by producing recognisable portrayals of problems, responses and effects. The principal audience which we have had in mind is staff in centres operating an open learning scheme, or planning to start one, and people at whatever level in FE with responsibility for the initiation and development of open learning schemes. For these reasons, purpose and audience, we have avoided many of the stylistic formalities of research reports.

The form of the project is reflected in the structure of this report. Part II consists of case-studies of the three schemes and their participants' experience of them. We have attempted to describe enough of the mechanics of each scheme for the accounts to make sense, but not so much as to lose the important themes in a mass of detail. Part III, 'Cross-Centre Issues', takes a little further the analysis of some of the significant issues identified in the case-studies. Our occasional emphasis on problems in

Part III is no condemnation of the schemes or the staff who ran them. It is instead a consequence of our belief that information on problems and difficulties, and on staff responses to them, can help other institutions to gain a better understanding of their own chances and circumstances. By any reasonable criteria the three schemes which we studied must be judged successful. The body of the report concludes with Part IV, an assembly of questions which teachers and college managers might consider in relation to their own open learning schemes, proposed or actual.

In certain parts of this report abundant use is made of verbatim extracts from interviews. Their purpose is either to establish a specific point or to offer live illustrations of points which have been argued in the text on other grounds.

PART II: THE OPEN LEARNING SCHEMES

In this part of the report we give in some detail accounts of the three open learning schemes which were studied in the project. In order, they are:

Chapter 3 **Flexistudy at Abraham Moss Open College**

Chapter 4 **The Mathematics and Communications Workshops at Bradford College**

Chapter 5 **TEC programmes at Moston College of Further Education**

Each scheme had been in operation for at least two years at the time of the study. As required by the project design they varied in a number of important ways: in the type of scheme, the apparent degree of vocational relevance, the type of student, and so on. Some of these differences should be clear in the accounts which follow, but there are also certain features of the student and staff experience which recur in the accounts and which will be reviewed at greater length in Part III, 'Cross-Centre Issues'. One last point which should be recorded is that at the time of the study all three centres were facing external changes, some apparently threatening: cuts in the budget, rumours of redundancy, changes in organisational structure, institutional mergers.

Since these are reports of schemes in operation at a specific period (the time of the project), they have been written in the past tense. Naturally much of what is said here will still be true at the time that this report is read: it is highly probable that the schemes will continue.

Flexistudy at Abraham Moss Open College

The Abraham Moss Open College (AMOC) formed part of the Abraham Moss Centre, an unusual institution. On one site there was an eight-form entry comprehensive school, an adult education college and a youth centre in addition to libraries, sports facilities, a theater, and the FE college itself. Most staff were appointed to work in more than one area of the centre; thus, for example, staff who worked in the FE section frequently worked also in the school and/or the adult sections. The innovative, comprehensive character of the centre not only made it difficult to manage, it represented a complicated institution in which to work, with complex networks of communications and inter-personal relationships. The complexity was patently a factor in the conduct of Flexistudy (FS) at the centre. It is perhaps apposite at this point to mention three other events that occurred during the period in which the project was conducted — November 1981 - March 1983 — and influenced events and opinions.

(a) The centre was in the process of changing its organisational structure, and early proposals had already been made.

(b) This change was then overtaken by the decision of the LEA to re-organize its 16-19 provision, and, as far as AMOC was concerned, this entailed a merger with the neighbouring college, at Moston. As a consequence, the re-structuring exercise in (a) was postponed while plans were made for the merging of the two colleges. By March 1983 this had been successfully completed and a second set of proposals had been issued, covering the organisation structure of the new institution.

(c) During the main period of interviewing, February — July 1982, the LEA was attempting to modify the conditions of service of the FE staff — at one point it threatened to dismiss all FE staff at the end of the academic year and re-employ for the next only those staff who agreed to new conditions of service. An agreement was reached which obviated this extreme action; but, as one might surmise, the affair represented a relatively hot issue at the time. The inevitable result of these events was to produce a considerable degree of distraction and uncertainty among many of the staff.

ORIGINS OF THE SCHEME

A new vice-principal took up post in 1976, an event which coincided with some wider publicity of the Barnet 'Flexi-Study' scheme. The staff of AMOC took considerable pride in its innovative character and its 'outreach' provision for the community, so that 'FS' seemed to fit the nature of the centre and supplement its range of provision. The VP decided to investigate the possibility of establishing FS in the centre. Visits were made to Barnet in order to clarify procedures, problems and approaches. During 1979 discussions took place between the centre and the LEA, and the latter sanctioned the establishment of two pilot distance learning schemes, of which the centre's FS was one — hence the possible population for the scheme was fairly large, and extended beyond the centre's normal geographical catchment boundaries. It was also decided that the centre's scheme would be based upon principles similar to those then operating at Barnet, and that, initially, some 18 'O' and 'A' level subjects would be offered. The scheme began in January 1980, amid some little tension for local branches of NATFHE were concerned about the threat it represented to recruitment on to conventional courses. As a consequence the range of subjects offered was agreed with NATFHE, and representatives of the Association observed the counselling that was given to the students who came forward in those initial stages. After those early days no further doubts were expressed by the local branches of NATFHE for there appeared to have been no discernible effect on traditional courses — some evidence, perhaps, for the concept of the 'missed' population. After some 18 months of operation the scheme was evaluated by the principal and the LEA FE adviser, and a number of strengths and weaknesses were identified.

THE SCHEME IN OUTLINE

The nature of FS may be familiar to readers of this report. In brief, the scheme facilitated student learning by the use of specifically designed learning materials, supplemented by tutorial support. This support could embrace a range of methods which included face-to-face tutorials, telephone contact, attendance at group tutorials or classes, the use of laboratory/workshop/studio facilities, and access to the centre's library, audio-visual and other learning resources.

The student fees for courses were derived from three components:

(a) the tuition fee — equivalent to the comparable traditional course,

(b) the cost of learning materials,

(c) a small charge to cover administrative expenses — e.g. postage and telephone calls.

Thus the courses were inevitably, at face value, more expensive than those conducted on a traditional basis for the cost of the learning materials was not insignificant; on the other hand, the expense of regular travel to the centre was avoided. The initial cost of an FS course could be a deterrent to many students but supportive arrangements, like periodic payments for fees and materials, would inevitably have increased the administrative complexity and burden of the scheme. Almost without exception the materials used were those produced by the National Extension College, though staff often supplemented these by the use of additional material, in the form of notes, diagrams, and examples. The exceptions included courses based on materials devised by the centre's Basic Skills Unit or generated by individual members of staff – interestingly in pottery and to support a course preparing prison officers for promotion examinations. Another member of staff produced materials to support a course in photography. The amount of staff time spent in generating such material depended upon a range of factors – among them their opinion of the NEC materials, their commitment, their views of the needs of students. Whatever the time spent, however, it came from the staff members own time – i.e. it was additional to that spent on the rest of his/her task.

The scheme began by offering a total of 18 subjects spread across 'O' and 'A' level. This range increased over the years. Table 1 shows what it consisted of in 1982–83.

Table 1

'A' Level	'O' Level	Other
Mathemetics	Mathematics	Study Skills
Physics	Physics	Prelim. English
Sociology	Sociology	Prelim.Maths
French	French	Maths Square Two
Pottery	Pottery	Prison Officers
English	English Lit. & Lang.	Basic Computer-Programming
Economics	Geography	
Chemistry	Human Biology	
German	German	

STAFFING OF THE SCHEME

When the original subjects were offered, the basis for the choice rested primarily upon two factors: the availability of suitable materials, and the staff who were keen to participate in the scheme. In later years new staff

joined the scheme, some to offer new subjects, others because they were replacing original participants. Whether or not all the members of staff in this latter category would have offered to join the scheme had they the choice is an interesting consideration, for not all found that they enjoyed FlexiStudy. As in all three schemes studied in the project, there was a range of valid reasons why they should experience some sense of discomfort — perhaps a doubt as to whether their subject could be learned in that way; or a belief that FS placed demands upon them which they felt were unfair, or for which they felt unprepared; or a feeling that they had most to offer in a more conventional classroom situation. This represents an issue that is dealt with in more detail in Part III.

Another significant factor concerning the staff is that they were drawn from two departments of the centre: the tutors for the arts and humanities subjects were based in one department, those for mathematics and sciences in another. An LII in each department organised the scheme in his/her own department and the first level of co-ordination was sited at the vice principal level, another significant factor in the scheme's development and operation.

In the early days of the scheme the staff were paid on the basis of tutorial and marking fees — as in the early Barnet model. As a result of experience and the evaluation of the scheme, this arrangement was modified to a system of caseloads which related to time-table allocations for full time staff and the payments that were made to part-time staff. The allocations of time obtaining at the time of the project are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Case-load (number of students)	Time Allocation
5 — 6	1 hour
7 — 9	1½ hours
10 — 12	2 hours
13 — 15	2½ hours
16 — 18	3 hours
19 — 21	3½ hours
22 — 24	4 hours

Such time allowances were set against a staff member's timetable, but not located in any particular time-slot, because the nature of the scheme theoretically precluded any particular time of the week on a regular basis. (Though staff did not necessarily operate their courses in this way, as we shall see later in this description.)

Both managers and staff within the centre acknowledged that

involvement in FS would change the teacher's traditional role and that there was therefore a need for some in-service development. In the main this consisted, in the early stages, of visits by key centre staff to other colleges and to conferences; and significant people in the FS movement came to the centre to talk to staff. This process laid a reasonable foundation and background to the scheme, but the next stage of a possible programme was more difficult to manage. Regular meetings and discussions among the tutors on the scheme represented a vital extension of in-service development, but the very complexity of the centre's activities inhibited the process. The range of each teacher's involvement in the centre's multi-faceted task made necessary a great many meetings for one purpose or another. With timetable commitments, and the difficulty of finding a common 'free' time if more than two or three staff needed to be involved, the difficulties can easily be judged. Yet another dimension was added by the consultative meetings made necessary by restructuring and merging during the project period. Besides the loss of the positive benefits such meetings could have brought, this lack of contact could give rise to a feeling of isolation among staff.

STUDENT ENROLMENT

The first contact a prospective student had with the scheme was with a secretary in the centre's main office, part of whose job it was to reply to enquiries by sending out brochures and enrolment forms. Prospective students learned of the scheme in a variety of ways; it is almost impossible to record, much less predict, which particular form of advertising was the most successful. The centre used many — posters, local newspapers, local radio and 'open days'. An attempt was even made to have a poster placed in the 'Rover's Return' on 'Coronation Street'! All these methods brought their quota of prospective students, but many still heard of the scheme by word of mouth. In the early stages many students were enrolled without the benefit of thorough counselling and this led to problems. Students contacted the centre at almost any time, so that the availability of a sympathetic secretary — who was very knowledgeable about the scheme — constantly at the end of a telephone line was an essential asset. Members of staff had so many other commitments across the centre that the chances of finding them at any particular time were small, and a good communications system to enable students' enquiries to be followed up quickly was obviously important. With experience the centre improved its system but there were obviously issues like cost and staff workloads to be borne in mind. Nevertheless, as the scheme developed, prospective students were more likely to be afforded careful initial counselling.

When a student enrolled, the learning package and any supporting

books were sent on by the secretary in the main office who also informed the appropriate FS co-ordinator. Heads of department were also informed and adjustments made to the caseload – and therefore timetable allocation – of the member of staff concerned. Since enrolment in FS could take place at any time in the year, goodwill and flexibility were required to cope with the frequent adjustment of teachers' timetables, though the 'banding' of case-loads did something to ease this situation.

When the scheme began students made a once-and-for-all enrolment, which meant they could take as long as they wanted over their course. As with most FS schemes, this practice gave rise to problems of identifying students who were 'live', 'dead' or merely 'sleeping'. Such a system was less of a problem when payments were made to teachers for tutorials and marking, for those duties were accepted in addition to their normal timetable commitments – a form of overtime. But the problems became different with a system of case-loads justifying timetable allocations for staff. In that situation staff may have had weekly timetable allocation for students who had exercised their right either to drop or to 'sleep'. This caused problems for teachers and managers alike and as a result FS students were later enrolled for a specific time period – one year for 'O' levels, two years for 'A' levels. At the end of the period students had either to re-enrol or to be considered 'dead'. In addition to problems of resource allocation there were also others relating to staff concern about the legitimacy of their case-loads in their own eyes as well as in those of their colleagues. There may also have been a clash between the tutor's wish to chivvy his/her students to maintain their motivation or to offer support, and a fear of intruding into the students' autonomy or personal circumstances. Staff used the telephone and sent letters, but the determination of precise numbers was very difficult. At one point, out of an enrolled student population of about 220, an estimate of 'live' students, derived as the result of interviews with staff, amounted to 140-175. This issue was real, for there was ample evidence of students who had remained 'sleeping' for periods exceeding a year and had suddenly resumed their studies. When investigations revealed a range of causes – including moves, changes of job, business problems, bereavement, divorce and other personal problems, as well as study and other academic difficulties – the problem for staff can be readily appreciated.

With the principle of once-and-for-all enrolment that was employed in the early stages, the number of students following FS courses grew steadily. Approximate figures for the progress of enrolments are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Jan 1980	Jun 1980	Oct 1980	Nov 1981	Nov 1982	Mar 1983
–	84	172	187	c230	140

These figures need a little explanation.

(a) The enrolments until November 1982 are cumulative in that they include all those enrolled previously unless they had:
   - sat the appropriate examination; or
   - completed their course, in the case of non-examination courses; or
   - indicated that they were ending their course for other reasons.

(b) The March 1983 figure is the result of the centre policy of limiting the time period for each course. All existing students received a letter informing them of this change; those who did not reply were assumed to have ended their course.

Enrolments increased as the result of renewed advertising and seemed at the time of the project to be moving towards the 200 mark which the managers in the centre believed to be an appropriate level of involvement – a belief based partly on the grounds of resourcing levels and partly on a judgement that 200-250 FS places was a proper size for such a scheme and would meet the needs of that portion of the centre's community which did not have ready access to its other forms of provision. This question of what proportion of resources should be committed to FS in view of all the other competing demands on a limited budget, and the criteria upon which such a decision should be based, formed a considerable managerial problem.

For the centre's FS students, the concept of the 'missed' population would appear to have held good: nurses, shift workers, postmen and others with variable working conditions were well represented. Other observations about the nature of the student population, derived from the internal evaluation, include:

(a) females outnumbered males by almost 2:1;

(b) the vast majority (c.85 per cent) fell within the age range 17–40;

(c) the expressed reason for study divided fairly evenly between vocational aims and general interest or personal development;

(d) over 80 per cent of the students lived within the normal catchment area of the centre.

Only a small minority of the students had joined FS because they preferred it as a method of study; the vast majority found that it represented their only means of access to the centre's courses. A number of students had joined FS only after they had attempted to enrol for traditional courses, found that the numbers were too small to allow the course to be conducted, and were then left with FS as their only alternative.

TUTORIAL CONTACT

Most staff attempted to arrange tutorial contact with their students on a regular basis, but for many this was not possible. Teachers arranged tutorials in different ways. For example:

(a) one or two fixed times (dependent upon their student numbers) when they conducted 'surgeries' — i.e. they were available for tutoring;

(b) group tutorials at times convenient to the students involved;

(c) individual tutorials held on a regular basis;

(d) individual tutorials arranged 'on demand' from the student.

Most of the tutorials were held in the centre, but some were held out of college wherever student and tutor could meet. These included in one case a cafe, in another, the local prison for both prison officers and prisoners. In circumstances like these, the more a teacher attempts to make access to tutorial assistance more 'open', the greater are the problems of expense and time. The teachers who involved themselves in this type of activity tended not to claim expenses, and to be relatively unstinting of their time; the possible reasons for this style, and its implications, will be raised later.

Different teachers had different styles in their approach to tutorial sessions, but one common experience was the great range of students who were encountered in the FS scheme. The work involved dealing with students who required very basic, almost remedial help, all the way through to students with degrees — even one with a Masters Degree — who wanted to pick up an extra subject for some particular purpose.

Another common observation concerned the personal relationship between students and tutors. A more detailed examination of this facet of the scheme will follow later, but it is worth raising at this point. Staff said that they knew their students on the scheme, whom they saw relatively infrequently, rather better as individuals than the students they met in their more traditional classes. The experience was more frequent when staff arranged tutorials on an individual rather than a group basis. Many students were grateful for the opportunities the scheme afforded them; and staff, too, remembered the successes of their past, individual students.

MONITORING THE SCHEME

A concern of all FS schemes is the scale of 'drop out' — as compared, for example, with conventional courses. In a situation of once-and-for-all enrolment this is difficult to calculate. Certainly, relatively small numbers came forward as examination candidates on the courses that had qualifications in view. In summer 1982, 13 students entered for 'O' level subjects, and 11 gained certificates; at 'A' level, the comparative figures were five entrants, with four gaining awards. It is easy to treat figures like these at face value and to compare them too quickly with those resulting from conventional courses. Such comparisons may be valid but there are other factors which need to be considered — relating perhaps to the type of students, and their motives, as well as concern with the efficacy of the methods involved on the scheme. The difficulty of defining or interpreting drop-out success rates is considered later in the report.

Records of the scheme were maintained largely in two locations. The secretary in the main office maintained the central records — a register of all students, addresses, subjects, and the tutors to whom each was allocated; she also recorded the arrival and return of assignments. As is often the case, she represented a vital lynchpin of the scheme. Individual records were also kept by each tutor — in the form of a register — concerning tutorial contact and assignment, but tutors tended not to be uniform in their use of the forms and sheets that had been designed.

One problem of administration, well known to anyone who has been involved with schemes of flexible learning, is the question of how the scheme is treated in the calculation of Burnham points. Most LEAs are only now beginning to come to grips with this national problem and Manchester was no exception. It is again significant, from the point of view of managing innovation, that the centre's management was prepared to promote the scheme with vigour and leave the working out of the administrative problems until a later point. This may be easier at the inauguration of a scheme — with managerial support — or when resources are relatively free; but as the scheme develops, especially within the present economic climate, these problems require a solution — particularly if the work spreads across more than one department. This process of re-appraisal and modification was happening at the centre at the time of the project.

DEVELOPMENTS AT THE END OF THE PROJECT PERIOD

The project necessarily gave rise to some discussion of the scheme among the staff. It was an appropriate time for such discussions, since the scheme had been in operation long enough to facilitate judgments of the

experience, and the centre was considering a new organisational structure in relation to the merger with Moston. The changes, briefly, involved:

(a) a sole member of staff at LII level to be responsible to the vice-principal for the co-ordination of all open learning in the new institution, i.e. Flexistudy and TEC programmes;

(b) a change to a time-limited enrolment;

(c) standard administration procedures across the new college — e.g. case loads;

(d) regular meetings of all staff involved in open learning schemes;

(e) co-ordination of publicity and fee level in the light of additional, neighbouring colleges establishing competing schemes.

The Mathematics and Communications Workshops at Bradford College

It was the original intention of the project to study both the Maths Workshop (MW) and the Communications Workshop (CW) at Bradford, but ultimately greater attention was paid to the MW because it was longer established and was therefore more fully developed than the CW; and because it had assumed a greater significance as an innovation and example of open learning with the advent of the Tutor Teach (TT) scheme for the provision of 'O' and 'A' level courses in mathematics.

The Communications Workshop still represents an element in the study because of the important comparisons it makes possible in the examination of the Maths Workshop, since it was based upon slightly different principles and fulfilled a different range of functions across a broader subject area. Some of these considerations will be raised after the description of the MW and the Tutor Teach scheme.

COLLEGE STRUCTURE

It should be made clear that the MW and the Tutor Teach scheme were two quite separate schemes, although each came to rely considerably upon the other to the point where they might have been indistinguishable to the casual observer. However, the fact that the two separate schemes did (and do) exist gave rise to certain features which will be examined in this report. To understand the situation more fully it is necessary to describe briefly the college structure (which at the time of writing was being re-organised under a new principal). Bradford College was organised on the basis of a matrix, with 'faculties', or subject groupings, along the vertical dimension, and 'schools', conducting groups of courses, forming the horizontal groupings. The arrangement might be illustrated as shown in Table 4.

Table 4			
Schools / Faculties	Combined Studies	Technology and Design	Business Studies
Maths and science			

Within the structure teachers of mathematics could be located within different schools, e.g. the teachers of maths 'O' and 'A' levels were located within the School of Combined Studies, and the teachers of maths for TEC courses were located within the School of Technology and Design.

Although all teachers of mathematics came together theoretically on a subject basis at the faculty level, their more natural day-to-day base in the organisation was their individual school. Within this situation, the MW was located within the Faculty of Maths and Science, while Tutor Teach was a scheme for the teaching of 'O' and 'A' level mathematics organised by the School of Combined Studies. The CW, like the MW, was also faculty-based and one result of this organisational placement of the workshops tended to be a difficulty over resourcing – both financial and staffing – since the schools formed the major units for resourcing purposes. Another significant background factor to the schemes is the size of the college and the immense range of work it encompassed. Its courses stretched from provision for the young unemployed right through the FE range to B.Ed. courses for intending teachers. Students from any of this range of courses were entitled to use the facilities of the MW and in fact did so; in addition, as its facilities became more widely-known, the range was extended by the presence of pupils from nearby schools, and, at the other end, by occasional degree students from other institutions.

THE MATHEMATICS WORKSHOP

The MW was established in the middle 1970s, partly as the result of an initiative taken by the then principal to provide assistance in basic numeracy. The eventual manager of the workshop chaired a committee of interested staff and, with the significant backing of the principal, acquired appropriate accommodation and began the workshop activities. In those early days (Sands & Spencer 1979) the main aim of the workshop was to provide support for the college's mathematics teaching, then conducted on traditional lines, as well as a facility available to anyone who wanted assistance in numeracy or maths. Two features of the early development of the workshop are noted here for exploration later:

(a) the backing of the principal was important not only in the acquisition of the accommodation, but also in the allocation of resources, for the MW did entail a considerable measure of 'double-staffing' — i.e. staff were allocated to students in the conventional classes, and extra staff were made available to those same students who utilized the support or remedial facilities of the workshop;

(b) the personality, ability and commitment of the manager who was able to gather a considerable array of learning materials, evolve an effective and simple administrative system from the workshop and encourage the development of an enthusiastic cadre of committed staff — not all of whom were mathematicians in their original training.

The Mathematics Workshop was a central service which provided individualized learning materials supported by tutorial help from the group of staff on duty in the workshop during the whole period that it was open. At the time of the project the workshop was open from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm from Monday to Thursday, and from 9.30 am to 4.30 pm on Friday — a total of 55½ hours per week. This policy of being open at all likely times was adopted to avoid deterring prospective students who might have been confused by less regular or comprehensive opening hours. As one member of staff remarked:

> 'That door has to be open whenever somebody comes up here — for some students it takes a lot of guts to walk through that door.'

Staffing

The staffing of the workshop for the remedial and support function was managed from a pool of hours that the user schools contributed to the faculty. The pool was formulated in different ways at different times: sometimes it consisted of some hours of a full-time member of staff's timetable; at others it was an allocation of part-time hours. The resourcing method could seem to an outsider to be a little haphazard, in that such a system may have been adequate when resources were readily available, but at a time of constraint it may not have provided an adequate basis for planning. At one point within the project period it seemed likely that the workshop might have to be closed on a particular evening, had it not been for the personal intervention of a vice principal. Some of the full-time staff contributed by schools under this arrangement were committed to MW teaching and had appropriate skills; but others, for various reasons, may not have wished to be involved. This raises the issue of the possible selection of staff for such flexible learning schemes, and the problem of who should have the responsibility for the selection. Many of the

protagonists of the MW thought that a large measure of the resource allocation should take the form of part time hours so that part-time staff could be appointed on the basis of their appropriateness for the workshop environment. This issue will be discussed more fully at a later point in the report, but the enthusiasm and commitment of the MW's part-time staff were very apparent to an observer of the workshop activities. It is also true that some college staff, not all of them teachers of maths, found that the development of the MW posed an unwelcome challenge to their traditional views about the job of teaching, and the reaction of such staff ranged from non-co-operation to outspoken opposition. A healthy feature of the development of both the MW and Tutor Teach which is worthy of mention at this point was the 'respectability' of opposition to the schemes, so that staff would put their case for opposing one or other of the schemes quite openly and their views were respected and considered. Nevertheless some tension would be generated when a teacher who found it hard to accept the scheme had to be involved in it, or when a member of staff who wished to utilize the MW fully belonged to a section which supported it as the basis of remedial work rather than as the prime medium of a course. But, on the whole, there existed a refreshing tolerance of staffs' varied viewpoints, and a considerable respect for professional autonomy.

Another significant feature in the matter of staffing MW activities — rather than TT — is the considerable proportion of workshop staff whose prime specialisation was not maths. In remedial work and basic numeracy there was a widely accepted belief among the MW staff that there was an important place for the good, empathetic teacher who not only was not a specialist mathematician, but who may even have experienced difficulty in learning maths. In all the observer's time spent on the MW, there was almost no talk of students in terms such as 'dim', 'thick' or less offensive euphemisms such as 'less-gifted' or 'remedial'; in the majority of the unguarded teacher-talk in the staff room, the concept that seemed to have overwhelming currency was that of the need to develop 'confidence' in learners, after which acquisition, it was assumed, students were likely to achieve their individual levels. It may be that the non-mathematician staff in the workshop were the source of the view that students were unconfident and unlearned rather than innately unable. While it may be the case that in certain areas of the MW's task these non-specialist teachers brought important attributes, they were obviously presented with many difficulties if they had to deal with students who were studying maths at a more advanced level — e.g. 'A' level or higher technician work. But this type of problem was not the monopoly of the non-specialist mathematician, as we shall see later, for the range of students using the facilities of the MW was so great as to preclude the probability of many staff being able to deal with all their queries.

Facilities

The MW comprised a complete floor of rooms. The main room was large enough to seat about 100–120 students, and in addition there were a number of rooms which could be used for 'withdrawal' groups of students, or for testing; an office for the secretarial help afforded to the MW; an office for the manager of the workshop; and, importantly, a coffee-room. In the main MW room the learning materials were stored and catalogued, so that they were easily accessible not only to the staff but also to the regular student users of the workshop. The materials had been gathered from a wide range of sources – the fire service, home service, armed services and many commercial and internal sources. They included textbooks and materials developed by college staff.

The spaciousness of the accommodation was important to the effectiveness of the workshop. Even when well-populated it never appeared crowded and the noise level was lower than that in a normal classroom, a feature encouraged by the workshop staff but permitted by the size and physical characteristics of the main room.

Students

Any student following a course within the college was entitled to make use of the MW and, in addition, it was possible for people who were not normal students of the college to pay a small fee in order to gain access to the MW's facilities. When students entered the MW they 'signed in', i.e. they recorded their name and the time of their arrival in a loose-leaf folder; when they left they recorded the time of their leaving. This record system was simple and caused staff and students little inconvenience but it was open to question as to its reliability since it relied heavily upon students to fill it in. Most were surprisingly conscientious about this task, as observation of students and the register confirmed, but the system was born in an era when the requirement for tight records was not as strong as it is now. As a result of this requirement, and the advent of Tutor Teach, changes were made to this system. Due largely to the efforts of one member of staff, the enrolment and registration system was computerized, and this was already showing considerable benefits in the management of the MW.

Some indication of the use made of the MW may be illustrated by the figures shown in Table 5. They cover a period of 28 days of the project – from April to May 1982.

Table 5

Tutor Teach Students Part Time	'A' Level	146	Tutor Teach Total	343
	'O' Level	197		
TEC	Certificate	286		
	Diploma	40	TEC Total	388
	Higher Certificate	62		
BEC/HNBEC		20		20
CGLI Craft/Technicians	Motor Vehicle	26		
	Electrical	14	Total CGLI	44
	Other	4		
Pre-nursing		41		41
Mature Students				
Mature Students Course		81		
OU		4		
BEd		2	Total	98
DipHE		8		
BA/BSc		3		
Computer Studies		19		19
Miscellaneous		18		18
			Total	971

This total does not include students following TT full-time courses or groups of students brought into the MW by their teachers on a class basis.

This table gives some idea of the range of students who made use of the MW, but another factor in judging the use of the MW is the time each student spent there. All the students except those on the TT scheme spent time in the MW additional to that already programmed for maths on their traditionally taught course. An examination of the record sheets over the same period of 28 days revealed the illustrative details of attendance shown in Table 6.

Table 6

	Maximum time	Minimum time	Mean time	Numbers
HTC	5 hrs 30 min	30 min	2 hrs 5 min	17
TC	4 hrs 15 min	25 min	1 hr 40 min	40
TECDip	5 hrs	60 min	2 hrs 22 min	12

The problem of recording these attendance data has already been mentioned, particularly as some of the schools wished to use the data for the calculation of Burnham points and for the purposes of resource

allocation. A more deeply-rooted issue concerns the status of this activity, for it represented an additional provision, or supplement, to a student's traditional course, and theoretically was not charged for within the course fee. However considerable and apparent were the benefits to the students of the college, the provision of the MW's facilities did represent an element of 'double' staffing, with repercussions when it came to calculating staff-student ratios — an increasingly important criterion of the efficiency of a college. The advent of the TT scheme did much to improve the situation as will be seen later.

Many students following traditional courses brought their own work and materials, such as textbooks, to the MW and got on with their task. If they encountered a difficulty, members of staff on duty in the workshop were available to assist them on a one-to-one basis. Should the member of staff judge it necessary or appropriate, learning packages were available to explain further a problem area, or to take the student on to the next stage of his/her learning. Most of these students came to the MW to gain either remedial help or supplementary assistance to their traditional classroom course. In addition the workshop offered TEC students the facility of sitting or re-sitting in-course tests, and thus provided a solution to a thorny problem faced by many colleges.

A large number of students went to the workshop to 'brush up' their maths, or to obtain help on a course where maths was needed for certain of its aspects but in which no formal maths tuition was provided. In the case of students such as these, their needs were diagnosed by means of a test and by discussion with a member of staff of the results of the test. Two copies of the computer print-out of the results of the diagnostic test were produced; one was given to the student as a work schedule, the other retained as a student record within the workshop.

* * * * *

This brief description should give some general idea of the work done by the MW until September 1981 and of the general facilities available within it. September 1981 marked the inauguration of the TT scheme, and if it is true that TT helped the workshop to become more economic in terms of resource utilisation, it is equally the case that TT would have been virtually impossible without the existence of the workshop and the firm basis it had already set.

TUTOR TEACH

Tutor Teach (TT) was a scheme established by the School of Combined Studies to conduct 'A' and 'O' level courses in mathematics for full and part-time students through the medium of individualized learning materials, supported by individual tutorial assistance from the maths

teaching staff. The scheme was operated through the MW and used all its facilities — diagnostic tests, learning materials, withdrawal rooms, calculators, textbooks, etc. There was no formal class teaching for the students on the courses.

Method and numbers

When students enrolled for maths courses at 'A' and 'O' level, they were:

(a) given a guide to the TT scheme, a suggested topic schedule, and a time allowance for each topic based upon a pace necessary to reach an examination deadline, but individual pacing and the selection of topic order, it was emphasised, were decisions to be taken by each student;

(b) allocated, after individual negotiation, times of attendance which varied according to the course being followed — 'O' or 'A' level — and whether the student was full or part-time; it was suggested that, for example:

- full-time 'A' level students should attend a minimum of six hours per week;
- full-time 'O' level students attend a minimum of four and one-half hours per week;
- part-time day 'O' level students attend a minimum of three hours per week;
- part-time evening 'O' students attend a minimum of two hours per week.

But it was emphasised that students could attend the workshop any time it was open from Monday to Friday.

Table 7 shows the approximate numbers of full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) GCE students on the various courses during 1981/82.

Table 7

	FT 'A'	PT 'A'	Total 'A'	FT 'O'	PT 'O'	PT Eve 'O'	Total 'O'
1981-82	70	110	180	98	256	132	486

These figures will give some indication of the scale of the operation, especially if one adds to it the other clientele of the MW indicated earlier. The factor of scale was an important consideration when it came to the

range of possibilities for individual choice of courses that the MW could offer, and in the efficiency of staff utilisation in terms of staff-student ratios.

When a computerized system of registration was introduced it became easier to calculate the numbers of students in the various categories attending the MW at any period, and therefore to allocate staffing appropriately. The enrolments and staffing in 1982/3 are indicated in Table 8.

Table 8

	Monday			Tuesday			Wednesday			Thursday			Friday	
	am	pm	ev	am	pm	ev	am	pm	ev	am	pm	ev	am	pm
'O'	12	81	60	34	59	64	9	12	37	60	20	45	10	15
'A'	64	43	27	36	30	12	67	8	27	19	39	10	2	23
Total	76	124	87	70	89	76	76	20	64	79	59	55	12	38
Staff	5	4	4	4	5	3	4	1	4	5	3	4	1	3

Students could change the times of attendance allocated to them at any point in the course to other times that for one reason or another were more convenient for them. They could also spend as much extra time in the MW as they wished; in some cases this extra time was quite considerable.

Each student was allocated a personal tutor who would be in the MW during at least one of the times allocated to the student. This attempt to afford a pastoral-cum-personal relationship did not always work smoothly during the first year of its operation, but it was proving more effective in the second. The generally accepted intention was that the personal tutor should take a close interest in his/her tutor group, monitoring both attendance and progress and fulfilling such tasks as the completion of UCCA forms and references. Students were required to sit progress tests at the end of topics, and also 'mock' exams. Although these may not always have been marked by a student's personal tutor, it was thought desirable that such work should be returned to each student by his/her own tutor. In this way some closer supervision of students could be managed in what might otherwise be considered a loose and impersonal learning situation. Any change of a student's time of programmed attendance in the MW automatically entailed a possible change of personal tutor. Among the staff involved in the scheme there was some question as to whether students received enough personal support or 'chasing up' during the first year. Raised in another guise, this appears to represent the dilemma between student autonomy in the learning situation and the perceived responsibility of the tutor. The principal in

post at the inauguration of the scheme believed that students should be given the right to decide whether or not to attend, and how often, and the scheme has been conducted on that basis. Such autonomy does cause problems for the notification of student attendances for LEA grant qualification, the calculation of Burnham points and, not least, for teachers wanting to do what they think best for their students. The observer in the MW could not but be impressed by the manner in which students came in and got on with their work. A possible explanation may be that the MW population was self-selected in that those students who were not thoroughly committed decided not to come along.

Origins

The TT scheme was first discussed in the GCE Division of the School of Combined Studies early in 1981, with a resulting paper being presented to a divisional meeting in February. At the time of the project the reason for, and the manner of, the introduction of the scheme were still issues that aroused emotions, ranging from heat and some anger through considerable speculation and doubt, to unqualified enthusiasm and approval. Most staff believed that there was a danger of possible decline in student numbers with consequent fears of redundancies. This belief was supported by the paper presented in February 1981, which stated:

> 'The declining number of students in the age groups which have traditionally sought further and higher education in Britain has caused, and will continue to cause, acute problems for institutions such as the Bradford College. This decrease in student numbers in both full-time and part-time education makes it necessary for us to look at improving our provision for students of all kinds and ages. The methods adopted must not only cater for our existing students, but must also enable us to increase our recruitment of those who in the past have "missed out" for one reason or another. We need a scheme which will create an "open learning" situation, i.e. a scheme flexible enough to meet different levels of students' skills adaptable to their needs and wishes with regard to attendance, and which will allow courses to run with small numbers of students. Such a scheme should allow a student to register at any time in the year, and to select his mode of attendance — full-time, part-time or even full-time attendance for short block periods combined with further part-time attendance.'

For some staff this was their first knowledge of a scheme which was to begin in the following September — some seven months later. One or two staff felt the scheme was pushed through too quickly, while the majority believed that this was the only way the scheme could have been introduced — for discussion might have gone on for ever. Perhaps most staff accepted the situation in retrospect because many of their apprehensions

concerning the ways in which the scheme might affect them were not realised. There was opposition to the scheme, some from mathematicians within the School of Combined Studies, some from teachers of other GCE subjects within the school who felt threatened by a possible spread of such flexible methods to their own subjects. One significant factor to be kept in mind is the fact that while maths was being conducted through individualized learning within the MW, all other subjects which the students may have been following were taught by traditional classroom methods. Thus students were always faced by a comparison that was presented to them either by the situation itself or more positively by some members of staff involved.

Among the factors which were significant in getting the scheme approved and established were:

- the implicit approval of the principal and the expressed support of the head of school who had himself been involved in experiments to widen opportunities for students to gain access to the college's provision;
- the existence of the MW, its facilities and systems, and, implicitly, a professional respect for its manager;
- the personality and political skill of the protagonist of the scheme who had been an important NATFHE official serving on many important LEA and college committees.
- the group coherence of the eight mathematicians within the school who had worked together for a considerable time. This enabled the debate, disagreements and all, to be conducted with tolerance and respect.

When the decision was taken things needed to be moved forward very quickly and it was at this stage that the coherence of the group was an important asset. Textbooks were chosen upon which to base the courses and staff volunteered to write learning units and other supplementary material – some gave up considerable periods of their summer vacation to do so. Some staff had a greater commitment to TT than others, the degree of commitment seeming to depend not only upon how much individual staff agreed or disagreed with the scheme, but also upon the grounds of this agreement and upon their own mathematical background and experience. This will be raised again further on in this report, but the varied degree of commitment obviously gave rise to considerable inequalities in the contributions of members of staff. It is a mark of the mutual tolerance of the staff involved that this situation led to almost no recrimination.

When the scheme began, in September 1981, all the staff involved realised that the period of preparation had been insufficient and that

modifications would have to be made along the way. Most also agreed that there was no way, even had the period of preparation been much longer, in which all the possible problems could have been foreseen — let alone solved. The organizers acknowledged that, in the first year, students were given almost no introduction to the scheme so that the tutors were overwhelmed by the demand for their assistance in the MW — to the point where students were having to wait 5–10 minutes for help. This problem was overcome in the short term by temporarily drafting in more staff; an induction period conducted in the following year avoided a repetition of the problem.

THE MATHS WORKSHOP AND TUTOR TEACH IN OPERATION

Having described briefly the working of the two separate schemes (the MW and TT) and traced their origins, it is now more convenient to consider them in operation together. Although they were in many ways separate schemes, as has been emphasised (and this had important consequences for resourcing), such a separation was neither discernible to an observer of the MW's activities nor of very great significance to the staff of both schemes in the pursuance of their everyday tasks. Staff in the MW at any one time comprised teachers from the School of Combined Studies for TT, and others — full-time or part-time — provided by the faculty pool to deal with the support service provided by the MW. The staff, however, did not discriminate between students in the MW, so that SCS staff dealt with TEC and BEC students as well as their 'own' 'O' and 'A' level students, and the faculty staff helped out with the 'O' and 'A' level students as well as their own.

Demands on Staff

This non-discrimination between the students involved in the two schemes served to reinforce a problem implicit in the workshop situation — that of staff not knowing what they would encounter when they offered assistance to a student. It was difficult for a teacher accustomed to teaching 'A' level maths to be able to help instantly with any problems drawn from any part of the syllabus, as was frequently the situation in the workshop where students may have been 'A' level students in their first or second years or even following a revision course in their third year. Given the range of students in the workshop the chances of a member of staff meeting a problem he or she could not answer were high. And it was not merely the problem of an 'A' level teacher meeting an applied problem in maths at the HTC level in electronics, or a statistical query from a degree student (both occurrences during the observation period); there was also

the 'A' level teacher meeting a simple problem of a student at the remedial level, and having to explain concepts taken for granted by his/her normal students. Some teachers found this relative insecurity — compared with the prepared classroom lesson — difficult to accept. At Bradford the tradition of the MW had eased the problem for the mathematicians in the TT scheme, many of whom had not been involved in teaching their subjects on technician courses. Most staff later found it relatively easy to admit to the student that they did not know and would either seek out another member of staff or have to go back after thinking the problem out. As a mature HTC electrical engineering student remarked:

> 'It's difficult for them (the staff) with me in my subject. They look at the problem and go away, then they'll come back and tell you how to do it. You can see how they're having to go and ask or think it out. There's only one or two of them who've done my work.'

This seems to be a characteristic, to a greater or lesser degree, of many flexible learning situations and one which will be analysed later. Suffice it to say that the approach to this problem seemed a healthy and supportive one in the MW. Staff usually found it easy to ask one another and a regular practice was symbolised by a 'too hard board' in the office of the MW on which staff pinned problems to which they could not find an answer. During the course of the day one of the mathematicians passing through the workshop was always able to offer help — without anyone feeling a loss of face. This supportive environment may owe much to the non-mathematicians who had worked in the workshop since its inception and who were used to having to ask for help.

This situation might have been eased by ensuring that a range of staff, representative of all the students who might use the workshop, was present at all times. But maths was taught by conventional methods within the other schools — for example within the School of Technology and Design which conducted most of the craft and technician courses — and, since staffing was allocated to normal classes, it became difficult to have staff always present in the workshop who were appropriate for the craft and technician students who made considerable use of its facilities. Such a predicament raises the issue of how far open learning schemes can successfully exist in harness with conventional systems and what tensions and difficulties might be expected. The scale or size of the scheme would seem to be an important consideration.

An important element of the supportive environment was the existence of a coffee room in the workshop. This is to oversimplify the situation, for much credit devolves upon the more permanent members of staff, but the fact remains that the workshop became an informal meeting place for maths teachers from all over the college, whether or not they were involved in either of the schemes. Discussion inevitably turned to the teaching and learning of maths, particularly as it affected the workshop.

This informal forum spread ideas, answered problems, co-ordinated assistance over the sitting of TEC tests and other such matters across the college. It also indirectly involved many more staff in the workshop, for to reach the office – and coffee – it was necessary to walk through the length of the workshop. It was almost impossible to be present at certain busy times in the workshop without being asked for assistance by one student or another – as the observer found to his embarrassment. Such influences are difficult to quantify but it is perhaps sufficient to observe that information and discussion about the activities of the MW were widespread among most of the maths teachers in the college. The schemes were not viewed as the monopoly of a 'clique'.

Mention has been made of the importance to the development of the scheme of the permanent staff of the MW. These numbered two: one was the workshop manager who spent all his time within it, either teaching or administering; the other was a member of staff from the School of Combined Studies, who had almost all her teaching timetabled within the workshop. One of the dangers, shared by the MW and TT schemes, was that of appearing somewhat impersonal to the students involved, especially in the early operation of TT when the personal tutorial groups did not function as effectively as had been hoped. The constant presence of two friendly members of staff may well have been an important way of overcoming this problem.

Staff in the TT scheme, new to the ways of working in the workshop environment, had to make considerable modifications to their style and role. At first many of them waited for students to hold up their hands seeking assistance; some even avoided 'seeing' students who might set them problems they might not have been able to solve. Later it was noticeable that the staff looked for students who may have required help, and many became adept at reading signals more subtle than an upraised hand.

Student response

Once students accepted the need to attend the workshop they could enjoy a significant degree of flexibility in what they did, at what pace, and for what purpose. The individual student could study for options either at 'O' or 'A' level – e.g. applied maths, further maths – for which no conventional classes could be run because of insufficient numbers. The student could set his or her own study and examination timetable. Thus, for example, one extremely diligent girl was doing two maths 'A' levels in one year – one of them a minority option. To accomplish this she frequently spent 25 hours a week in the MW. She was also doing 'A' level economics, and, when asked how she found time for this, she replied in a

matter-of-fact way:

> 'I attend the classes, and study it over the weekend.'

She was well motivated, being a foreign student aged 19, and paying for herself; she was also extremely critical and demanding. She had not liked the MW at first, but soon realised that:

> 'I needed to rely upon myself a lot more and ask questions. It suits me to set my own pace and I know, for example, I can always get extra examples and past exam papers. I've done three past papers already this week (it was Tuesday pm) and I'm using these AEB papers just to look at.'

This perceptive and determined student perhaps helps to illustrate the degree of flexibility available in the schemes; she also revealed other possible issues, when she remarked:

> 'Sometimes I found it difficult to get tutor help, especially in the early days when all the other students wanted help. Sometimes I had to wait 5–10 minutes and I used to find myself grabbing Mr —— (a well known 'A' level tutor) when I could see someone else's hand up, and I used to pull myself back. Now, when I'm doing an exam paper here, I need help quickly, and I make sure I get it . . . Some teachers are 'O' level teachers and they're — er — not 'A' level teachers. I tend now only to ask the 'A' level teachers.'

This student was sufficiently skilful and determined to get help when she wanted it and from the staff who could best provide it. Not all students were so adept, although it was surprising just how many students had worked out how to use the schemes to their advantage. Some students obviously needed more assistance in these new skills, especially if they had come from schools and were studying their other subjects in a conventional manner. The induction period would have helped many, but some form of 'withdrawal' groups might have eased the transition for some students into the individualized MW environment. Such withdrawal groups had been discussed by some of the staff, but the protagonists of the TT scheme had argued against them in those early days because of a fear that there might have been a regression to normal classroom methods. Most staff in retrospect concurred in this judgement but felt that, once the scheme had been established, such a tactic could be considered.

Many students expressed doubts as to their progress on their courses and said that they would have liked some 'normal' classes so that they could find out how they were doing. One group of 'O' level students had just completed a mock examination and had all passed with varying degrees of success. But even though it was pointed out to them that their results indicated satisfactory progress, they persisted in expressing a wish for some other means of re-assurance, but of a form they were unable to articulate. This problem may require a greater degree of personal

tutoring, as distinct from subject help. It may reflect, however, a certain understandable ambivalence towards the methods in an environment where all other subjects are studied conventionally. This same ambivalence was encountered with a mature student following an HTC in electrical engineering. He worked in an oil rig (two weeks on, two weeks off). He stated quite openly that his HTC tutors had not expected him to pass his maths phase tests, but that he had been able to do so relatively comfortably because of the time he was able to spend in the workshop when he was home – upwards of 20 hours a week – and the tutorial help offered. He said, with conviction:

> 'If there were workshops in other subjects, you'd have a lot better students.'

He continued by commenting that the conventional course was:

> '. . . too condensed, too quick for anyone except the bright. You only get the strands of the subject. In class it's all coverage and there's no time for questions.'

Yet when asked whether he would like to do more of his course by workshop methods, this grateful student made it clear that he regarded it only as a back-up service to 'proper classes'. The basis of this type of ambivalence is another issue which needs to be examined.

The workshop method of teaching maths may obviously not be appropriate to all students, and certain groups had needed a lot of support and were so identified by staff. On the other hand, it is equally true that the conventional class method is not appropriate for all students and the workshop offered such students a large measure of flexibility in terms of choice of staff, topic order, and, importantly, pacing. Mention has been made of students making 'informed' choices of tutors, and as many students expressed strong preferences for the workshop compared with traditional methods as yearned sometimes for the reassurance of the conventional classroom. Staff cited examples of students who had 'caused trouble' in the classroom but who settled down to be good and competent learners in the workshop. One such group was interviewed. It consisted of three girls on craft courses; they had not enjoyed being a minority in a class of boys and were spending more time on their maths than their course demanded. As one teacher remarked:

> 'Most of these students, on the whole, are "failures" anyway. They've been through the school system, and have failed, or haven't been given the opportunity – these are the two sorts we get here. This has to be a different method for them.'

The flexibility of pace is important for students like this. One teacher used the workshop for a remedial group in a TEC Diploma course, who, as records illustrated, had failed their tests abysmally. She described how

the group had spent a long period making what appeared to be very slow headway, but subsequently she said:

> '. . . the progress of some of them has gone exponential, and they're doing well, and enjoying it.'

This too was confirmed by records and interviews.

Over all the workshop gave an impression of students who took their studies very seriously in the vast majority of cases and who made good and full use of the facilities it afforded. A feature particularly striking to one used to observing classroom transactions was the complete absence of any feeling of tension or of the fragile disciplinary atmosphere that is sometimes present in student-teacher relationships. Much of this was probably due to the fact that students were free to attend or not, but it also owed much to the friendly and efficient environment that had been developed.

THE COMMUNICATIONS WORKSHOP

The Communications Workshop (CW) was supported and resourced by the college in the same way as MW; indeed, for reasons which will become clearer, some staff argued that it had been funded more generously. It is impossible to make absolute comparisons of the two workshops because of the differences of history, personalities and other complex factors, but some significant considerations would include:

Purpose

- The MW set out to assist the learning of a specific and clearly identified subject area.
- Communications is less clearly identifiable as a 'subject'. It might include English 'O' and 'A' levels, as well as all the work that might be pursued under BEC and TEC and within the liberal/complementary/studies components of other courses.

Thus provision was made for formal language work and, in some cases, for work in literature, but much of the work of the CW was concerned with design, layout and pictorial/graphic illustration which is included within the very wide concept of 'communication'. Therefore, in addition to printed learning materials, the CW provided cameras, tape recorders, typewriters, reprographic facilities and even word-processing. When one adds to this very diverse provision the need to cater for the interpersonal activities involved in 'communications', the distance between the idea of the MW and that of a 'similar' CW begins to grow larger.

Staff

- The MW, and particularly TT, grew from a reasonably tight and coherent group of staff.
- By the very nature of the 'communications' activity described above, and its scope across the college, it was difficult to form a coherent group of staff to push things along as was the case with TT.

Role

- With TT, the MW became a vehicle for **conducting** courses and a subject.
- To a large degree, the CW was a **support** for a very wide and diverse set of activities.

The CW provided important facilities for many students and staff in the college, but the proposal (under discussion at the time of the project) to make it the basis of courses, as the MW was to TT, may have required a more complex development than would be implied by an intention simply to replicate the MW.

TEC programmes at Moston College of Further Education

The third open learning scheme to be studied had the clearest vocational emphasis of them all as it consisted of programmes of the Technical Education Council (TEC)[1]. The awards were Certificates in Mechanical and Production Engineering (TEC programme area A5) and in Electrical Engineering (TEC programme area A3).

Moston College of Further Education was a small college in the north of Manchester consisting of four departments: Engineering, Science, Commerce and Community Education and General Education. The Engineering Department, the location of the TEC open learning scheme, was the largest department in the college with 26 staff and was itself divided into six sections which jointly covered all the main engineering specialisms. Unlike the other two schemes described in this report, the Moston open learning scheme crossed no departmental boundaries; all teaching, including the general studies teaching, was undertaken by staff from within the department.

THE SCHEME IN OUTLINE

TEC programmes were normally composed of units, each full unit in a conventional college programme requiring 60 hours of college study time. For a Certificate to be awarded a total of 15 units had to be successfully completed, and conventional day-release students would study five each year. Except for the free-standing units in general and communications studies, each unit in a Certificate belonged to one of three 'Levels': Level I (taken by students entering with the basic requirement of three CSE passes), Level II, and Level III (the final level of attainment). A unit at one level was intended to build upon the knowledge and skills acquired from units at lower levels. The same programmes were used by Moston for its open learning scheme as for its day-release courses and contained four units at each of Levels I and II, four and one-half units at Level III (including a technical project) and four and one-half free-standing general

1 TEC merged with the Business Education Council in October 1983 to form BTEC; the nomenclature in use at the time of the project is nevertheless also used in this report.

and communications studies units (which, for administrative reasons, were referred to as GCSI and GCSII). Most student work in most of the units was assessed typically, by 'phase-tests' (short question papers), homework assignments, practical work, and, in some cases, end-tests.

The scheme was referred to internally and in the publicity as 'distance learning', but in the CET terminology defined in Chapter 1 it was a **local** open learning scheme. Students were given or directed to self-study learning materials but they could also attend the college to receive tutorial assistance, undertake practical work, take tests, etc. One evening each week was timetabled for these purposes, attendance being formally optional with a minimum requirement to allow practical work and assessment, thereby meeting TEC policy.

ORIGINS OF THE SCHEME

The original stimulus came from the local education authority. In the late autumn of 1978 a conference was held locally on open learning schemes, promoted by the Council for Educational Technology, and the event coincided with discussions which the local authority inspectorate had been having within the education office and with the colleges. The outcome at Moston was an item on the agenda of heads of department meetings and the establishment of a group to investigate the problems and opportunities of open learning. It was noted that the principal and vice-principal of Abraham Moss Open College already favoured the development of open learning for GCE subjects in their own institution.

The development of the engineering scheme was initiated by the then head of department and a senior lecturer in the department. Partly because of the conditions of service negotiated between NATFHE (the teachers' union) and the education authority, there had been few evening courses available to students unable to attend full-time or by day-release. The existence of a need, or demand, was suspected and some thought had already been given in the department to providing TEC programmes for 'external students' (the TEC term for students unable to study by conventional mode). As with FlexiStudy at Abraham Moss, the proposals for an open learning scheme in engineering were viewed with some anxiety by NATFHE officers in the authority who were doubtful that the proposed time allowance for staff was adequate and unconvinced that student numbers for day-release courses would be unaffected. Open learning, it was believed, could be a means for employers to get training on the cheap. The scheme nevertheless went ahead in September 1979 with two members of staff, a senior lecturer and a lecturer II, being given operational responsibility. Then and later the staff of the scheme underwent little deliberate staff development, partly because of a lack of resources but also because their experience of one or two open learning

events had left them feeling that they knew at least as much as the organisers.

As at Abraham Moss and Bradford the original initiative came from above, i.e. from senior officers of the authority and senior staff of the college. We consider later in this section how the scheme was developed in the first years of operation, but we should note here that the interest shown by other agencies in the Moston scheme – the first significant local open learning system leading to a TEC qualification – was seen by the scheme organisers to be a valuable form of external support. Visits by other colleges and invitations to contribute to conferences helped to legitimize the role of innovator. TEC was, of course, one of the interested outside agencies. The offer of Certificate programmes through a different mode of study, it was discovered, required specific validation, and discussions were held between college staff and TEC officers on such matters as the availability of learning materials and the criteria to be used in admitting students. The negotiations began late and the scheme was finally validated some months after it had started.

STUDENT NUMBERS

Previous sections of this report have shown how the determination of active student numbers on an open learning scheme can be a complex task with an ambiguous outcome. The Moston scheme was no exception but, as we shall show, the internal requirements for management information on the scheme made the task somewhat simpler than it was at, say, Abraham Moss.

Two points need to be made before reporting the available numerical information. First, the cumulative nature of TEC units made it natural for nearly all students to study units from just one level at a time and allowed units at different levels to be introduced in successive years: in 1979/80 Level I was offered; in 1980/81 Levels I and II; and in 1981/2 and subsequent years all three levels. This had the advantage, in the staff view, of permitting operational problems to be identified and resolved before the scheme became more complex. The second point is that in the first three years of the scheme only one student enrolled formally later in the academic year than October.

For each student, essentially, each year's new set of units constituted a 12-month course beginning in September or October. One reason was that many students joined the open learning scheme direct from TEC or City and Guilds of London Institute (CGLI) day-release courses. On finishing one course they looked for the next. Another reason, apparent from the 'enquiries' file and form interviews with students themselves, was that late summer or autumn was, simply, the most common time for

prospective students to think about beginning or continuing their studies. There were also two aspects of college practice which may have increased the chances of a common starting date. These were the publicity for the scheme, which was usually timed to appear in June or September, and the system for administering and charging for schemes. Fees were payable annually in the autumn and it was not possible for a student who wished to start in February, say, to pay a half fee. In principle, at least, this could discourage students from joining then and staff from recruiting them.

In 1979/80, the first year of the scheme, 15 students were formally enrolled, all except one intending to study three units. TEC policy allowed students with successful past records of study or experience to be exempted from the corresponding units and all the entrants, as predicted in the publicity leaflet, were given exemptions from the Level I units in general and communications studies and workshop processes and materials. This left them to follow Level I units in mathematics, physical science and engineering drawing. Until December 1979 the students were accompanied by four others preparing for 1980 Open University courses, a short-term enrolment which was repeated in the next academic year.

Table 9 shows formal enrolments over the first three years of the scheme.

Table 9

	1979/80	1980/81	1981/82	**Student numbers**
Level I	15	8	11	(including 4 inmates of a local prison)
Level II		20	20	
Level III			16	

There were direct entrants to the scheme at both Level II (in 1980/81 and 1981/82) and Level III (in 1981/82.) These were people whose previous study either exempted them from the lower level units or, in some cases, actually was those units. In 1981/82, for example, there were six direct entrants to Level III, of whom five were completing a day-release course (after their entitlement had expired or their jobs had changed), and one with a full CGLI qualification wanted three units, though not the TEC Certificate, to start a degree course. Of the 20 Level II entrants in 1980/81, eight had progressed from the previous year's Level I, and 12 were direct entrants – seven with CGLI qualifications, three with TEC Level I units from a day-release course, and two with GCE qualifications.

The numbers of units which those 90 enrolments are recorded as having intended to study are shown in Table 10.

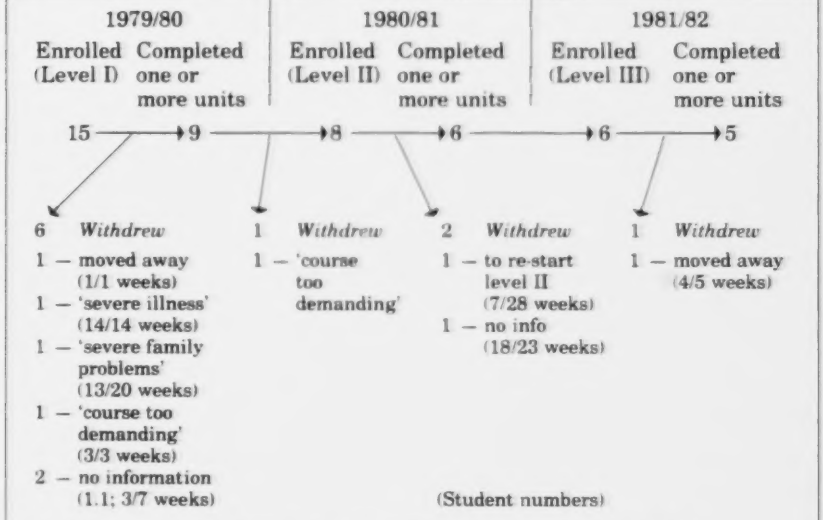
Table 10

			Student numbers	
5 units	4 units	3 units	2 units	1 unit
26	1	51	8	4

A number of students who began with the intention of studying five units in a year subsequently dropped two to provide a more manageable workload.

Table 11 shows what happened to the first year's intake of 15 Level I students. (The annotations of the withdrawals show, firstly, the number of weeks which that student was recorded as having been in contact with the college during that year, and, secondly, the week in which the last contact was made. So '(13/20 weeks)', for example, means that the last contact was made with the student in the 20th week of the academic year, and that the student had made some contact with the college staff in 13 of those 20 weeks — in person, by telephone etc).

Table 11



Note: phrases in quotes are the officially recorded reasons for withdrawal

Such a chart obviously raises the perennial question of drop-out rates. It is an issue which may be illuminated by the better-documented paths followed by the 20 Level II entrants of 1980/81, of whom 12 were new and eight were progressing from Level I in the open learning schemes. (See Table 12.)

Table 12

20 Level II entrants in 1980/81

- 1 – took 2 units to complete day-release Cert. Passed.
- 2 – took 3 units: awarded day-release during the year; left the scheme
- 17 – took 5 units
  - 12 passed 5 units
    - 3 awarded day-release; left scheme
    - 9 enrolled in 81/82 at Level III
  - 1 – passed 3 units; enrolled in 81/82 at Level III
  - 2 – broke off to start again at Level II in September 81
  - 1 – withdrew because of a change of job
  - 1 – withdrew immediately after enrolment; no information

It can be seen that, of the 20 Level II entrants in 1980/81, only ten enrolled the following year for Level III work. For the institution this could have seemed to be a high wastage rate, but a closer inspection of the recorded intentions and destinations, as shown in Table 12, reveals that the term 'wastage' is inappropriate: six students achieved their aims of either being offered day-release (by employers, persuaded by their success) or completing a Certificate course which they had begun on day-release; one withdrew because of a significant shift in the work he was doing; two took time off from their studies during the year and re-enrolled for Level II the following year; and one, an enigma, enrolled for the year, paid his fee and then had no further contact with the college. Does this imply that there were ten drop-outs, or four, or one, or none? It is an ambiguity which has been identified and documented in greater detail by Roger Lewis in his study of students of the National Extension College (Lewis, 1980). As he puts it, 'The term 'drop-out' is hard to define, has unfortunate overtones of failure and the act of dropping-out is hard to identify with precision.' A point which we return to later in this report is that the definition chosen is likely to reflect the interests and purpose of the definer.

ACCOUNTING FOR STUDENT AND STAFF HOURS

As in other FE courses the number of students on the Moston open learning scheme (a figure required for the FE Student Returns each November) was taken to be the number who had enrolled and paid their fees minus the number who were judged to have dropped out. Since some students made no contact with the scheme staff for a month or two and then re-appeared at one of the evening sessions, it was a judgement that was exercised with some diffidence. Some indication of whether a student was 'live' or 'dead' was provided by the class register, kept weekly, in which a tick was placed by a student's name for any contact which he or she had made with the college during that week, whether by attending the tutorial session, by sending in work, by telephoning the staff, or by any other means. In 1981/82 when 43 students were formally enrolled, an average of 24 students each week made contact with the staff. A large majority of those who successfully completed one or more units made contact in more than 80 per cent of the weeks of the academic year. A substantial proportion of the successful students in fact treated the scheme as a special kind of evening class.

These measures of student numbers meant that any pressure to retain or chase students came not from a managerial concern for resource use but from the concern of the scheme organisers for the progress of individual students. The relative purity of the judgement necessary was enhanced by the degree of flexibility allowed by TEC as to when students could register with TEC and when successful unit completions should be reported. (Some students, for example, took their final tests in the September of the next academic year.) At times the staff experienced the dilemma reported in the Bradford and Abraham Moss accounts and analysed at greater length in a later section of this report: how could the wish to encourage students be balanced against the desire to respect the student autonomy implicit in any open learning scheme? The limited administrative support which was available to the Moston staff during the early years of the scheme's operation would have made it difficult, in any case, to send regular inquiries to students with whom no recent contact had been made. In one year, however, a sympathetic and encouraging letter was sent in February to 21 students who had not been in touch for six weeks or longer. Nineteen replies were reported by the staff. Those students whom we interviewed who had received the letter said that they were surprised, pleased and encouraged. For example:

> 'I'd been having some difficulties at work and that had meant a lot of overtime, and I had really given up any idea of studying on the course. I was really surprised when I got the letter from (X). I thought I'd have to have another go.'

"I'd noticed that all the keen ones had been turning up just about every week, so when I didn't go for a while I thought that was it. The letter made me think about brushing the dust off some of the books."

The first student quoted above did indeed submit more work and attended one or two weekly sessions, but eventually disappeared again. The second student, who at the time of the interview was still considering re-entry, picks out a feature of the scheme in operation, identified above, which deterred a number of other temporary drop-outs from becoming active again – namely, the almost weekly attendance by some students at the optional evening session, and the consequent creation of a form of evening class. It is a point to which we return.

In the first few years the method of determining the appropriate number of staff hours to allocate to the scheme was as straightforward as the method used to count students: the weekly evening sessions were counted as an evening class, and that period of time was entered in the teachers' timetables. As Levels II and III were introduced successively, the number of scheme teachers grew from two in 1979/80 (when three units were offered) to five in 1981/82 (when 19 units were being taught), and the session itself expanded from two to three hours. In effect the staff were receiving no extra time allowance for materials preparation, scheme administration or contact with students outside the weekly sessions. Partly as a result of the merger with Abraham Moss Open College, the method of allocating staff hours was changed in 1982/83 to the case-load system, e.g. 12 minutes per student per week on each teachers' weekly timetable. This increased the number of hours which most members of staff received for the work.

PUBLICITY AND RECRUITMENT

A number of methods were tried to bring the scheme to the notice of potential students. In September 1979, at the beginning of the scheme, a small advertisement was placed in the local evening newspaper. The result was reported to have been 18 enquiries and 15 enrolments (the total for that year). That was the last year that money was available for newspaper advertising. Between 1980 and 1982 the scheme was publicised in other ways: leaflets to public libraries and Jobcentres (beginning: 'Too old for day-release? Unable to attend college regularly due to itinerant working or disability?'); a long entry in the typescript college prospectus; letters and leaflets to local firms (more than 200 sent out in 1981). At the beginning of the 1982/3 academic year an article was published in a small local paper which led to ten enquiries and about four enrolments. The other methods tried were less successful. It was the impression of the staff, supported by our student interviews, that one of

the most effective means of dissemination was by word of student mouth. It was scheme policy that all enquirers should visit the college for a pre-entry discussion with one of the three central scheme organisers, when the intention was that aims, circumstances and current state of knowledge of the potential student should be reviewed and the nature and workload of the scheme explained. According to the staff, and to the students, almost all the potential students had clear reasons for wanting to join the scheme. A paper by Taylor, Morgan and Gibbs (1981) analyses four types of student orientation to a course: vocational, academic, personal and social. In the year 1981/82, when the bulk of the fieldwork for this project was carried out, we succeeded, after taking staff and student advice, in finding only one student whose orientation was not clearly vocational. He was a man whose job, though related to the engineering industry, required no specific knowledge of it. His motives were more personal than vocational:

> 'When I was a lad I had a chance of doing the National (Certificate), but I couldn't be bothered taking it up — too busy boozing and running after women! . . . A couple of years ago I did some "O" levels — it was a psychological thing — and when I saw this course it seemed like the right thing for me — something I could do, and it would stretch me, show what I was good for.'

The paper by Taylor, Morgan and Gibbs also distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic interest in a course **within** each type of orientation. A vocationally oriented student with an **intrinsic** interest would be concerned that a course should make some clear contribution to the skills and knowledge needed on a job; one with an **extrinsic** interest would be concerned more that the qualification should simply further his or her career. Students of both kinds were found on the Moston open learning scheme, but from the information that was available or collected on the students' jobs and motives it is likely that those with an extrinsic interest were in the majority. Some were afraid that their lack of engineering qualifications would make them first candidates for redundancy; some wished to gain a TEC Certificate as a degree entry qualification in order to get off the shop-floor; others wished to increase their chances of promotion. In the first three years of the scheme, the oldest entrant was 55 years old, the youngest 18. In each year more than 60 per cent of the students were aged 25 or over; most of the younger students were either completing a TEC Certificate that they had started on day-release or were CGLI craft students demonstrating to their employers that they were capable of work at technician level.

It was the policy of the college, as of TEC, that students should not be admitted if they were able to attend by day-release from work. We found only one student who would not have preferred to be studying by day-release.

THE WEEKLY TUTORIAL SESSIONS

For one evening each week the students were able to attend the college to receive tutorial assistance. The timetabled session was two hours long in the first two years of the scheme and three hours in later years. In 1982/83, as further open learning schemes were provided, a second evening was made available.

In 1981/82, when all three Levels were offered for the first time, there were five classrooms available (one for each teacher, notionally), plus workshops and the college library. The rooms were among the brighter and more attractively furnished ones in the college. Attendance at any particular session was optional and students came to sit tests, to discuss general or specific learning problems, to undertake practical work, or simply to re-establish contact.

Most of the units required the students to undertake some practical work – experiments, exercises, assignments – and all new students were given a written guide to writing up reports in case they had little experience of it. Because of the need to prepare the practical work in advance it was not found possible to allow just any experiment to be taken by a student on any evening. The normal pattern was for a set of experiments to be made available for three or four consecutive weeks, an intention which was made known to the students two or three weeks in advance. Some practical work was carried out by the students at home: a sliding friction experiment was one example, and, for some drawing units, T-squares and drawing boards were given to the students on temporary loan. All the students we interviewed welcomed these home facilities.

Student reasons for attending an evening session were usually straightforward and unsurprising: to complete some practical work, to take a test or hand in an assessed assignment, and so on. But for some students attendance had a value beyond the obviously functional:

> 'I was lucky that there were some blokes in the same sort of position as me when I joined . . . One of the first tests we had – I got stuck on a bit of the maths, so I was nervous about handing it in – but then I found everyone else had too!'

> 'It's my only intelligent night out in the week – you're talking about something that matters.'

Contact with staff and other students could mean moral support and intellectual stimulus. Many students identified the scheme far more with the evening sessions than with the study they undertook at home. It was a view which some staff recognised and understood:

> '. . . We say to them, look, if you're not having any trouble, this Monday evening is an optional tutorial. If you don't feel you need to come along then don't – stick the stuff in the post and we'll take it from there.' But

> you find they very often will call in, and they'll say, 'I just want to hand this in. Anything to come back – homework?' And away they go – just that little bit of contact – literally five minutes. And they like us to ask questions – 'Any problems?' – simply so they can say 'No, I'm doing fine'; and away they go . . . It's that little bit of contact. We may call it distance learning, but I don't think the students call it distance learning.'

Many students were anxious at first about what was expected of them and whether they would cope. The observable friendliness and informality of the staff did much to lessen the anxiety, but certain less obvious staff and student skills were necessary if students were to make efficient and unembarrassing use of their time. The problem – and it was by no means a major difficulty – arose from the complexity of the social process that may have been taking place when a student arrived: five rooms, five staff, perhaps 25 students – all occupied on tasks individually or in small groups. The student had to enter the room, identify the person or people whom he or she wished to speak to, gain their attention, transact the business, and then either start the process again or leave. Complex social skills were required on the part of students, staff, or both, and it was clear to an observer that most staff normally took care to acknowledge all entrances and exits, and to explain any likely delay before they could speak to the student. Students were reassured by the use of first names and by the fact that their backgrounds, circumstances and academic progress were often known by the staff. At times there was a short queue of students to see a member of staff; for some students this had the consequence of causing them to meet to discuss TEC work outside the college.

It will be clear already that the task of the tutor was potentially complex. One member of staff observed that:

> 'It's harder than day-release in some ways. With day-release lads you've got to con them into learning. With the (open learning) students you don't have that difficulty, but they tend to be at different levels, they may have gaps in their knowledge, they might not have studied for years.'

Several different roles are implied by that interview extract: diagnostician, study skills counsellor, large group and small group teacher, etc. It is a variety which is identified in earlier sections of this report, but one which was peculiarly easy to observe at Moston. Table 13 shows how one tutor spent the first one and a quarter hours of his time at one of the evening sessions.

Table 13

6.15–6.25 – Student 1 arrives; tutor discusses with him the difficulties the student encountered in carrying out a certain piece of practical work at home.

6.25–6.30 – Student 2 arrives; tutor joins him to advise, firstly, on degree entry and, secondly, on the student's recently marked assignment.

6.30–6.50 – Moves to Student 3; discusses the student's project, looks at student sketches, finds and uses certain examples in a textbook. Acknowledges the entry of Student 4.

6.50–6.55 – Student 5 enters; tutor discusses with him progression to Higher TEC qualifications.

6.55–7.00 – Returns to Student 3, who had been working on a particular example; discusses approach.

7.00–7.05 – Leaves room to collect drawing materials.

7.05–7.15 – Delivers materials to Student 3; skims through assignment brought by Student 6; discusses the approach.

7.15–7.25 – Returns to Student 3 to hear and advise on his re-thought project proposal.

7.25–7.30 – Greets Student 7 and receives his assignment; has parting words with student 3; reviews assignment of Student 7.

Those are the activities of a member of staff who was providing tuition across a range of units. Staff with more specialist contributions were sometimes able to spend their time during the evening sessions in a way that resembled more closely the traditional taught class. We have already recorded the high attendance rate of a number of the students, and if there was a group taking the same programme (electrical or mechanical) and a teacher who enjoyed class teaching, then the phenomenon of the would-be evening class could easily appear. The advantages of such an arrangement were the speed at which material could be covered, the benefits of group learning, and student satisfaction with a familiar kind of teaching and learning. Against such an arrangement could be set the disadvantage experienced by students who missed one or two sessions and the consequent teaching difficulties the next time they appeared, and the decrease in flexibility in the use of time by the students and other staff. It is another issue to which we return later in this report – as is the breadth

of ready knowledge which several staff felt they must possess if they were to cope:

> 'You've got to be genned up for every little eventuality. It's a different scheme of work for every student.'

It was not a problem which was experienced to the same extent by staff who were able to run a taught class or whose teaching commitments were to just one subject area.

OTHER CONTACTS WITH STAFF

Students who were unable to attend a number of the evening sessions were frequently encouraged to go to the college at other times. Some students sat in one or two sessions with existing classes; others would spend a couple of hours or even a whole day in taking outstanding tests. If student numbers had been greater such ad hoc but valuable arrangements would have been less practicable, as would the telephone calls made by students to course staff. Calls to the college were likely to be successful owing to the single extension shared by the three key staff. Telephone calls to staff homes had to be controlled more tightly after the first year, when at least one member of staff found a significant part of his weekend was taken up with answering queries. The common practice which developed was to give specific days and times when each member of staff could be telephoned at home. Students and staff agreed that most of the calls were about either administrative matters or relatively minor difficulties which students had encountered in their learning materials. Sometimes the queries were tricky:

> '. . . The problem of a telephone tutorial can only be fully appreciated after attempting to explain the solution of simultaneous equations by this means.' (**Report on the First Year, 1979/80.**)

Students and staff occasionally met outside the college: a student might drop work at a lecturer's house; a member of staff might visit a student who had been unable to attend the evening sessions for some weeks but who wanted to continue to study. The decision in each case was the individual teacher's.

LEARNING OUTSIDE THE COLLEGE

Most of the students' study time was spent away from the college working from textbooks, as directed, or from college-devised material.

Over the first few years of the scheme 'learning packages' had been written for a number of Level II units, i.e. those units which most students

on the scheme had to study but which were poorly served by existing textbooks. According to one member of staff, 'Many textbooks are written for lecturers, not students, and a lot of students find that they're given too much on a particular topic.' The packages consisted typically of objectives, text and illustrations. Self-assessed questions (in the style of the Open University) had been tried but were omitted after students claimed to have found them unhelpful. Students at the time were not charged for the materials, the course fee being simply the equivalent evening class fee (£21.00 – £25.00 in 1981/82). The fee system began to change in 1982/83 after the merger with Abraham Moss Open College.

For most of the units students were provided with study schedules, not learning packages. These were based on one or more recommended textbooks and broke the year into blocks, giving for each block the topic areas, the timescale, the detailed topics with page references to the textbooks, the last date for submitting the appropriate assignment, and general details of any related phase tests. These would be handed out at intervals with occasional hand-outs and sheets of examples and questions.

The extent of self-help groups among students was difficult to determine precisely, but some examples were identified. A sub-group of the very first recruits, for example, frequently met two or three times each week to swap difficulties and attempt solutions. Both the records and their own accounts suggest that as the group was formed and became established their attendance at the evening sessions, though regular, became less frequent.

COURSE STAFF

In the first year of the scheme's operation two academic staff were assigned to do the administrative and tutorial work. In the second year they were joined by a third member of staff, and it was those three who worked on the scheme every year and who individually offered a broad range of units. The three shared a staff office (with one other) and their regular proximity allowed a continuing interchange of information and experience. All three had been mature students themselves and expressed a sympathy and support for the students on the open learning scheme (an attitude which had been recognised and welcomed by all the students we interviewed). One had studied with the Open University, an experience which had apparently been helpful when developing the Moston scheme. Other full time lecturing staff who joined the scheme later had also gained qualifications by part-time evening or distant study, and also had a sympathy for the open learning students. One common element in their attitudes was their admiration for the students' commitment. For example:

> 'The whole of the attitude of the students on that course is — whatever,

they're going to get that bloody unit!'

'It's the first time you find students who are more committed than you are.'

Naturally the staff were not referring to every open learning recruit. What was identified was a tendency which distinguished the open learning students, in their view, from the day-release classes. It was a tendency which arguably both strengthened and was strengthened by the staff willingness to invest more time in the scheme in the early years than they could ever claim on their teaching timetables. In addition to producing learning materials and brief study guides, for example, they also did much of the clerical work themselves: typing, duplicating, addressing envelopes, and so on. Such tasks are undertaken with relatively little remark in much of further education, but become heavier burdens in an open learning scheme. The departmental secretary was able to take on some of the work, and it was recognised in the department that some further administrative assistance would be necessary as the scheme grew.

It is also arguable that what enabled the scheme to become established was that same staff 'goodwill'. The original initiative may have come from the top, but the continuing development was undertaken at the middle levels of the hierarchy. This should not be seen as a development from below, however. Both the original head of department and the person who succeeded him part way through the second year of the scheme were strongly in favour of it and concerned that it should succeed; and the three core staff — two senior lecturers and one lecturer II — were far from being junior members of the department.

PART III: CROSS-CENTRE ISSUES

It will have been apparent in the preceding accounts of the three schemes that there are a number of issues which, to varying degrees, were common to all. They are gathered here under two headings:

Chapter 6 **Issues for teachers**
Chapter 7 **Issues for college managers**

A logical third heading would be 'Issues for students', but we are conscious that the likely readership of this report consists of teachers and managers of existing or potential learning schemes rather than the students themselves, and, as in the accounts of the three schemes, we have included any appropriate information on student experience within the two sub-sections.

Since this part is a discursive analysis of certain issues, and no longer a report of specific schemes in operation, we move frequently into the present tense.

Chapter 6

Issues for teachers

In this section we pick out and elaborate a number of pleasures, uncertainties, ambiguities and dilemmas which were experienced by a substantial number of staff of the three open learning schemes studied in the project and which appeared to be significant to the working of the schemes. It is not our intention here to offer direct guidance on staff development for open learning, a task which is undertaken by a number of other publications (e.g. Lewis 1981a, 1981b).

We have organised these issues into five clusters: becoming involved, the control of knowledge, the complexity of method, the complexity of role, and the nature of 'personal distance'. All the issues reflect the accommodations made by staff to the new teaching demands of open learning schemes. As perceptions of the demands vary, so too do the responses.

GETTING INVOLVED

Those perceptions of what is required may become significant as early as the preliminary discussions of a new open learning scheme. The initial judgments of staff at this stage may be highly important, for much of what happens afterwards may be appraised by criteria implicitly set up at the beginning.

To simplify, but not necessarily to over-simplify, there are two groups of staff who become involved in open learning schemes:

- those who do so for positive reasons, who are convinced that the scheme is beneficial;
- those who join for other reasons, who find themselves involved because of decisions taken by their superiors or, in some cases, by their colleagues.

Enthusiasts

The former group are important because they usually provide the driving force behind the scheme and often give strong personal commitment to it.

The origins of the commitment of these staff vary, as the preceding case-studies have suggested, but can often be found in a conviction that there is a missed population of students who should be brought into FE, or that there are better ways than the traditional to manage student learning. Thus, of one protagonist it was said:

> '(X)'s background, and the way he came up, is the real reason for his commitment to the scheme.'

Another member of staff gave this reason:

'There was more to it than numbers — it was beginning to treat students as adults and as being responsible.'

Such staff may be vital to the establishment of any scheme since they are prepared to work exceptionally hard to ensure its success. In all the schemes under examination these central staff were readily identified by college managers and colleagues. The personalities of these central characters may also be significant, for, in an FE world alive to and cynical about 'band-wagons', in none of the schemes was any accusation made that the major reason for their involvement was the hope of personal advancement. On the other hand, such members of staff may provide poor models on which to predict the probable reception of a new scheme by the bulk of staff. The commitment and enthusiasm of these protagonists helps them to accept the relative uncertainties that are inherent in any innovative scheme, and, if there is a group of them involved, they gain significant mutual support.

'People feel quite relaxed in criticizing the scheme — the people in it feel like a big family. We'll call each other names, and argue among ourselves; but let anybody else criticize us, and we all close up.'

Sceptics

The second group — those who find themselves involved in schemes for negative reasons — is also important. In the theory of innovation, the population of those involved is often categorized thus:

minority percentage in favour	majority 'persuadable'	minority percentage opposed

Many of the staff in the central, majority, category become involved in schemes because decisions are taken for them, or because they replace staff who were originally involved but have left. Some do not feel very strongly one way or the other and learn to cope well with the new situation with the support of the enthusiastic group; others, as we shall see, cope by making the 'new' scheme fit as nearly as possible their traditional ways of

doing things. This central group becomes more critical as the scheme becomes more extensive in numbers of students and staff involved. The selection of new staff and the help afforded them in facing uncertainties may be vital elements in the success of a developing scheme.

Some staff, inevitably, are not won over to the new schemes and, it must be emphasised, their objections may be perfectly defensible. They may state that the way in which a scheme was introduced left them disaffected. According to a member of staff on one scheme:

> 'Some staff are more upset by the way things were done rather than by what was done.'

And another said:

> 'I had some reservations about the scheme; when you make a radical change like this it requires a lot of careful thought . . . There was almost no debate as to whether this was a good way to teach (the subject) or not. I raised a few points, but it all had to be done in a few weeks.'

Pressures to change and to meet new demands and problems are very strong in FE at the moment, and action cannot always await the resolution of everybody's doubts. Some staff recognise this:

> 'I can understand (X), because he had to get the scheme under way; it might have been discussed for 25 years, and still have nothing happen. He's done a job that none of us would have taken on . . . he really stuck his neck out, and some of us would not have done.'

But staff do have real doubts about schemes, perhaps, again, in terms of subject.

> 'The (X) syllabus is too crammed, and we don't get the (normal number of hours). In spite of this we're trying to keep up standards and to cover the syllabus properly — we have to make sure the subject isn't diluted.'

Sometimes doubts are expressed about student competence in open learning:

> '. . . but our students are not that well organised, and couldn't work on their own — they need someone always to be standing over them.'

The fourth kind of doubt, or objection, which we identified arises from a comparison with traditional teaching. One conclusion which is sometimes drawn from the comparison is that open learning schemes represent an inferior, second-best form of educational provision, e.g:

> 'They should be going to night school.'

It was a judgement which, as we have shown, a number of students shared, and that too can weaken the assurance of a new member of staff or strengthen the view of an objector. In one centre, it was stated:

'Teachers of other subjects got ever so stirred up and threatened. They used to hear students talking about it (the scheme), pick out the discontented ones and encourage them to complain.'

A second objection arising from a comparison with traditional teaching concerns the material prospects of staff. In one scheme, for example, staff thought that after the packages had been prepared they were likely to lose their jobs. Such reactions may be extreme but are illustrative of how far uncertainty can reach when a new scheme is introduced, especially in a period of perceived external threat.

At this personal level the same factor can take another form. In one centre it was said that some staff had not become involved because they thought their chances of promotion were greater in the mainstream of conventional work. In another college a member of staff thought she had missed the opportunity for promotion by leaving the area of work in which she had been involved. Whether or not these beliefs were well grounded they had consequences for staff attitudes. It must also be noted, however, that other staff saw involvement in the open learning scheme as a way of furthering their careers, simply because it was the only current innovation in which they could take part.

The final critical conclusion which staff could arrive at after a comparison of open learning with traditional teaching concerned resources and status. Institutional signals can be important here. The resource-allocation systems in most colleges are designed for traditional work. One scheme had encountered difficulties in funding part-time teaching, for example, because the normal procedure did not allow a 'case-load' method of payment. It had reached 3.45 pm of the day on which a part-time teacher was required for a session starting at 6.00 pm before finance was actually granted. Sometimes, too, scheme organisers may feel they are not being treated fairly in the allocation of staff — numbers may be felt to be insufficient, or the choice not entirely appropriate:

'We sometimes get what's left — the dead-beats. People try to palm off some bad stuff.'

Again such feelings may not be entirely justified, but it can be appreciated how such perceptions can intensify feelings of doubt as to how a scheme stands in relation to other work. Some staff do not feel this uncertainty as greatly as others; conviction, early success, and membership of an involved, supportive group can help considerably. Staff most prey to these doubts are those who find themselves isolated, perhaps located among other staff not involved in the scheme and with little opportunity to meet the enthusiasts.

Many of these objections can be neither argued conclusively nor defeated; they depend upon certain views of the teacher's world. What they illustrate is the importance of a number of **uncertainties** as staff

move away from the familiar traditional teaching role. In a traditional classroom a teacher has many 'knowns'. For example:

- The practice and methods of classroom teaching are known and accepted by teachers and students and are reinforced by the practices and conformity of colleagues. They are enshrined in the values and norms of the college, by its procedures and rules; and not least they are probably the criteria considered for promotion.
- By the preparation and selection of material, and the control of pace and direction, a classroom teacher can define what is to count as knowledge and how the students are to receive it.
- Since teachers hold the initiative in a class they can determine the amount and type of teacher-student interaction.

Open learning schemes, to varying degrees, tend to weaken those relative certainties. In the following sections we consider some of the consequences.

THE CONTROL OF KNOWLEDGE

In any scheme where the intention is to move some of the initiative and control in the learning situation from the teacher to the student, the teacher is more likely to meet the unexpected and face a greater degree of uncertainty. All teachers have a professional self-concept, and for some it is important that they are seen by their students as 'knowing their subject' – being an expert. In the classroom such a teacher can usually control events to ensure that that status remains secure. The pace can be controlled so that areas of uncertainty are not reached; the path of the lesson can be strongly determined; and all examples or problems used in class can be carefully prepared beforehand. These features may well be judged to be the qualities of a conscientious well-prepared teacher. But open learning schemes tend to erode this capability of control by the teacher. Once the lock-step of class teaching is exchanged for a degree of student self-pacing, a group of students presents a different problem for the teacher. As one teacher observed:

> 'When I do a class, I prepare one week's work; but when I do a (group) tutorial I have to prepare several weeks' work!'

The extra work-load represents only one facet of the potential difficulty. More important are the teachers who feel they ought to know, finding themselves in a situation where they do not know. if that situation is public, the effect upon a teacher's self-concept may be more serious. One can sympathise with the teacher who said:

'Although we may be a specialist in (the subject), you can't be conversant with every sort of problem in it. You can sort it out in the end, I suppose. I've just spent 10 minutes on (topic X) with a student – it was a complex problem. I sorted it out in the end, but it was 20 minutes or so before I could get to terms with myself. It's not only hard for a teacher, it's bordering on the unfair! Whereas with a normal course, I go in prepared with all the examples; if I haven't prepared, then I can be blamed.'

Teachers may become anxious or alarmed at the loss of control:

'The point that you had to have enough information to cover the whole course in one gasp, more or less, and be ready to do a tutorial on any particular aspect, frightened me at first – in that I'd only really, up to then, prepared lectures for two or three hours, knowing exactly what I was going to do. I doubted myself – whether I would be able to recall all the information that I wanted to pass on'

That particular member of staff quickly became reconciled to his change of status and even began to enjoy the unpredictability. Traditional classroom teaching, by contrast, could be unstimulating.

In two of the schemes studied during the project, teachers' professional activities were visible to their colleagues, and their working lives may have experienced a subtle change. One teacher remarked that:

'We've lost the privacy of error. You now have to make your mistakes in public.'

A member of staff of another scheme was asked about the necessity for seeking help from colleagues:

'Oh, I think that sort of thing is marvelous. The staff are very good in the sense that, if they don't know, they'll say "Joe, I can't do this", and you'll say, "Neither can I, we'll ask Fred" – and you don't take it as a slight upon yourself. But that's not the system, that's the staff.'

Many teachers may never, during long careers, have had another professional in their classroom and the 'publicness' of some open learning schemes can create tension and uncertainty. It is the uncertainty, or felt incompetence, of the adult student who fears to make a mistake in public and wishes to practice the skill alone. Some of the staff who found the uncertainty unpleasant would attempt both to control the direction of the students' learning and to create physically some privacy of work. For other staff, sharing with colleagues and students their control over the flow of knowledge was a new and welcome professional satisfaction – not a serious professional problem.

THE COMPLEXITY OF METHOD

Many of the staff in the schemes studied by the project had discovered that they needed to acquire new skills and new methods of teaching, some relatively simple, some complex. One set of skills related to the writing and use of learning materials.

Learning materials

Many staff had spent a considerable time in writing or supplementing learning materials, often not because none was available from commercial sources but because the teachers were not satisfied with them.

Teachers frequently do not trust learning materials produced by others (often with some justification). Some can offer a detailed analysis of the material to prove their case, and such staff have either written their own or supplemented existing material in a discriminating manner. By far the most usual way of coping was for the member of staff to give out the normal classroom handouts. Some teachers used such handouts to supplement the material, others gave them out in bulk, so that students may have been faced with two routes through the course, with, perhaps, some resulting confusion. Staff adopted this tactic for a variety of reasons. Some did it under the pressure of time which prevented them from writing more appropriate material; some may not have realised the difference between classroom notes and learning materials; while others wanted to ensure that they had 'covered' the course for their students. This concern to do their best for students, and sometimes not being quite certain how to do so, was a persistently recurring theme when talking to teachers in an open learning scheme.

Some staff saw little difficulty in writing learning materials. One commented:

> 'A number of us are old sweats who've been teaching many years at all levels, and so it wasn't much of a problem.'

But he went on to say:

> 'On the other hand, there was a lot of talk and argument about levels and styles.'

Comments like this are often designed to lessen the problems in order to ensure that schemes start on time. On the other hand it was clear that several teachers did not accept that writing learning materials required special skills. It is possible to be over-subtle (or cynical) in interpreting interviews with staff, but the vehement insistence on that point by some teachers did suggest, at times, that the requirements of materials writing were being selectively ignored as another way of coping with the new

situation. Perceptions of what was needed from the teacher could again stay unchanged.

Marking student work

The second skill to be identified was that of marking student work — essays, assignments, exercises, etc. The importance of marking student work in a sensitive and informative way is emphasised in all the guidance manuals on open learning: it is, after all, one of the main channels of communication between teacher and student. The students who were interviewed during the project certainly supported that view. Most of them had experienced some anxiety at the time of the first assessed piece of work:

> 'I was a bit panicky, wondering whether I'd understood it, if I'd come up to a brick wall.'

> 'You really need homework to get feedback to see how well you're doing. The trouble is that you've nothing to compare yourself with.'

The need to assess student work carefully and to provide helpful feedback was generally recognised by the staff of the three open learning schemes. Staff who saw the students frequently were able to give much of the feedback orally, a less burdensome task than writing it all down. Staff with fewer chances for meeting the students sometimes saw the marking of scripts as an opportunity rather than a problem:

> '(X) — he has a marvelous thing about marking: he says that a marked script should be a piece of teaching material — we could copy the idea. The marked script must tell each of them where they've gone wrong and how to put it right or we're storing up trouble for ourselves.'

Tutorials

The third skill, or method, which a number of staff had identified was the effective use of small group or individual tutorials. It is of a greater complexity than the two skills we have already discussed.

The possibility of running a near-traditional taught class in certain open learning schemes is described in Part II of this report (the three case-studies). Further illustrations have been provided in this Part. A minority of teachers in all three schemes conducted group tutorials in preference to individual tutorials or ran taught classes in preference to both. Reasons additional to those identified earlier in this report include, of course, the more economic use of teacher time and also the discomfort felt by some teachers at one-to-one contact with a student — which is partly the issue of

personal distance, considered later, and partly the issue of greater exposure. In a traditional class the failure of some students to understand the teacher may not be noticed; when dealing with students individually any inadequacy in a teacher's explanations may become unavoidably apparent. However hard this may be for a teacher to accept, the situation is made all the more difficult when the failure takes place in 'public', an occurance perhaps illustrated by this exchange with a group of students:

> Student: 'Some of them (the tutors) are not all that good – they tell you, "Do this, do that", and then wander off.'
>
> Interviewer: 'What do you do then?'
>
> Student: 'Get another one who explains it.'

Some teachers perceive no threat in this situation; one commented that:

> 'In fact, it's interesting – a lot of the (X) students don't ask me things; perhaps I do it too quickly for them, and they'll go for a teacher who'll perhaps be more patient with them.'

Another teacher put it a slightly different way:

> 'That's it: they not only have the choice of specialist, they have the choice of personalities.'

In many open learning schemes, however, the students have only one tutor available for each subject and the competitive aspects of one-to-one tuition are not relevant. But occasional aversions to that style of teaching may still be found and can be based upon a strong sense of professional identity:

> 'I've got some good lessons in me. An exposition, my own way of explaining, has been developed over the years. It's essential to have a person, as my students tell me, "to hit it in" . . . anyway I enjoy giving an exposition, standing up in front of a class, and doing something I'm enthusiastic about, and know about.'

The advantages and disadvantages of such a traditional approach were described briefly in Part II, and despite the reduction in scheme flexibility which such lock-step methods can bring about, no final judgement is possible.

THE COMPLEXITY OF ROLE

It has always been difficult to define the role of teacher in further education, but what is apparent is that open learning schemes make the task of definition more complex and more hazardous. A teacher in one of the open learning schemes studied in the project compared the role with that of the traditional classroom teacher:

> 'And, of course, your role changes. As a teacher in a classroom — you know, you perform, you're up there performing. But, in this scheme, you're all sorts of things — tutor, helper, counsellor. It's a different thing altogether — your role changes.'

These various aspects of the teacher's task have always been present but, with part-time vocational students, elements of them did not register with many teachers — or could be ignored by them. The increase in the numbers of full-time students in some colleges and, more recently, the advent of YOP and YTS, have placed greater emphasis on the tasks of tutoring and counselling. Open learning also seems to make the need for these tasks more explicit, enlarging their significance and bringing them to the fore. One reason may be the differences from the traditional job, but that will vary with the nature of the scheme; another stems from the one-to-one relationships so frequently a part of the open learning scheme

Student-autonomy?

A number of the staff were confused about their role in the open learning schemes, a confusion which, in some cases, could be explained in terms of an ambivalent attitude towards student autonomy. There may appear to be conflict between student autonomy and a teacher's sense of responsibility for the student's academic success. In traditional further education, if that sense of responsibility dominates the teacher may be accused of 'spoon-feeding', of restricting the scope of student judgement and decision. In the open learning schemes which we studied there was some evidence that a proper concern for student progress and welfare could conflict with the scheme's flexibility, particularly when it was in the early stages of development and the staff had to demonstrate that they were neither cynical band-wagoners nor organizers of a second-best course. Two teachers, to our knowledge, had withdrawn from the schemes on the grounds that they did not believe they could do their best for the students within them.

The official policy of the schemes may be that when and how often to attend are decisions to be taken by the students themselves, but many teachers wondered if some students would have performed better if they had been 'chased' a little more. This was a matter of concern among teachers of adult students but became a critical issue in schemes which recruited adolescents, a category of student which was often believed to benefit from a more gradual award of autonomy.

The age, or stage of development, of students may be one factor in the problem of the division between teacher-responsibility and student autonomy; another is the remoteness of the learner from the college's tutorial and support facilities. It is, on the surface, much easier to grant

adult students the right to autonomy but if that student is entering, or re-entering, the learning situation with trepidation and perhaps with some learning difficulties, the conscientious teacher is likely to feel no less concern. One teacher, who dealt with a course at a basic level, described his dilemma.

> 'So many of them (students) need personal support. At one time I decided to do nothing and let them take the initiative (in arranging tutorial sessions). It didn't work — nothing happened. . . Another was getting on well, and then suddenly no assignments, so I rang up — a close relative had died, and I felt so embarrassed. I used to chase them, but it seems wrong to harass them.'

The concern not to intrude unwittingly into the personal lives of adult students is real and was a problem that had been encountered by a significant number of staff. Some teachers handled such a situation with more discrimination than others who felt it was no part of their task — again, the problem of personal distance. On the other hand instances were quoted when the tutor's letter, or more usually telephone call, was significant in re-activating a flagging student:

> 'One lady was doing ever so well and then went silent for a month or so. I rang her, and she said, "It's a good job you phoned. I'd just put it (the assignment) up on the shelf — I couldn't understand it." I got her to come in for a tutorial, and after that she was fine.'

Each teacher's dilemma in this situation may be exacerbated by managerial requirements to identify which students are 'live', 'dead' or merely 'sleeping' in order to plan or monitor resource allocations. It is a matter of some delicate judgement.

Tutorials

Another way in which this same issue of uncertainty of role shows itself is in the question of just how far teachers should go in order to accommodate their students in terms of arranging tutorials — especially in the schemes involving remote learning. It was a fairly common occurrence for staff to meet students for tutorials outside college — in cafes and pubs — often with no travel expenses reimbursed. It was also common for teachers to make extensive use of their private telephone to contact their students, invariably at their own expense, especially when access to a telephone in college was difficult.

'I even have to make phone calls from my home and don't get paid for them, though I pay here (in college) for personal calls. I discourage students from phoning me at home. In the end, there may be just too much reliance upon the initiative of staff.'

This member of staff was deeply committed to the scheme in which he was involved but felt that at times his commitment was being exploited — mainly by himself! Another teacher was more accepting of the dilemma in which he felt he had put himself in an attempt to offer as much help as he could to his students:

> 'They laugh at me — I'm supposed to be as hard as nails — but I like helping people, so I see them at home and in the holidays.'

Other staff established fixed times for student contact and also tended to see students in groups. Of this group of staff, some saw little essential difference between traditional teaching and teaching in an open learning scheme; others were deliberately trying to reduce the uncertainty of their role. As a generalisation, the teachers who found it difficult to draw the boundaries of their role seemed to share three characteristics:

- they were deeply committed to the scheme in which they were involved;
- they accepted that involvement in open learning was very different from that in traditional courses — for all it may imply in different techniques, practices and relationships;
- they tended to accept the probability of personal closeness to their students.

These may well be the characteristics of conscientious teachers on traditional courses, but open learning may make those people more vulnerable to uncertainty since there are fewer precedents to follow in colleges largely embodying traditional values and practices. Such teachers were found in all the schemes; there seems no way of removing this dilemma. Where its effects were weakened, it was usually managed by membership of a supportive team which generated its own norms and some recognition in the eyes of the college managers, not necessarily expressed in material form.

PERSONAL DISTANCE

A problem for individuals in many professional areas — doctors, teachers, nurses, social workers, etc — whose work brings them into a particular type of contact with their clients is to maintain a balance between professional and personal involvement. To remain relatively distant in such a relationship may permit a degree of objectivity but may also limit the quality of the assistance that the client receives. To develop too close an empathy with a client, however, not only restricts the professional's objectivity but also leads to difficulties in distinguishing professional and

personal matters.

In dealing with students most teachers would accept the concept and existence of learning difficulties; most would also accept that teachers have to recognise them and do what they can to alleviate them. If the learning difficulty consists of the lack of some subject knowledge or skill — e.g. transposition of mathematical formulae — most teachers would do something to assist and would recognise such assistance as part of their professional task. If, however, an adult student is undergoing some personal crisis — perhaps with children, spouse or in bereavement — it will undoubtedly affect learning capability, but does it rank as a 'learning difficulty' in which a teacher ought to be involved? Different teachers will obviously make different decisions, but some teachers, whatever their expertise in their subjects and teaching, make better tutors than others. It may seem obvious but it is worth stating that tutoring is not the same as teaching. Many staff in FE have spent much of their professional life teaching part-time employed students. Those who have become tutors in full-time courses, or on pilot YTS programmes — with the emphasis on student negotiation — will have probably experienced a qualitative difference in their relationships with students.

The distinction between personal and professional life, i.e. personal distance, is less easy to maintain in an open learning scheme with unpredictable tutorials and one-to-one teaching. Many staff in the schemes studied claimed that they had got to know their students on the open learning schemes more fully and more quickly than they did the students on their traditional courses, even though the open learning students were seen less frequently:

> 'After the first couple of meetings in this way (one-to-one) you got to know so much about them. Over a cup of coffee you have the lot — kids, husband and ambitions.'

One consequence of this lesser personal distance was the personal pleasure — greater, apparently, than for students on traditional courses — which many staff claimed to have experienced at the success of their students, particularly those who were judged unlikely to have benefited from a more conventional form of study: a prison officer passing his promotion examinations and progressing out of interest to 'A' level sociology; a semi-skilled engineering worker who became a technician; a market trader who was qualifying for medical school, and so on.

The process of teaching on an open learning scheme, too, was often compared favourably with more traditional forms of teaching. For example:

> 'I work full time during the day, but I prefer it this way (the scheme) — it is much better than the classroom. It's relaxing — like gardening!'
>
> 'I'd far rather spend time helping two or three people to make gigantic

progress than in chivvying a crowd of people who are unwilling learners.'

It was the one-to-one relationship which, even with younger students, appeared to prevent the confrontations which can arise between teacher and class. (The large number of students who could be present in the Bradford Maths Workshop, for example, almost never created problems of discipline.) The relationship could also make the progress of individual students more apparent, thereby giving the tutors an enhanced sense of achievement.

The potential of open learning schemes for developing students' personal and social skills was identified in Part II. This was how one teacher characterised the process:

> 'It's largely a matter of treating people as adults – which sounds a glib thing to say. It's not a question of throwing them onto their own resources – you treat them as adults, tell them what is needed and let them get on with it as far as possible – but with a massive back up'.

This style of working can develop in staff the ability to help students' personal and social development – an ability presupposed by many new curricula. None of these satisfactions is absent from traditional classrooms but the view of the staff interviewed was that they were less easily acquired there.

While some teachers found close relationships with students to be unnecessary or undesirable, there were many who welcomed a pastoral role and, who, in some cases, found it difficult to distinguish it from the pedagogic role. In one scheme confidence was seen to be the critical step towards mathematical achievement and what affects a student's confidence, it was believed, may be rooted almost anywhere within his or her experience. The one-to-one relationship will make it much more likely that factors affecting mathematical achievement are revealed; if that one-to-one relationship involved an empathetic teacher, the revelation of these factors is almost inevitable. When talking of staff having to change their style in the workshop, one teacher said:

> 'The majority have adapted very well, but some staff have found it hard on a one-to-one basis – and they're not necessarily against the scheme. Mind, students, once they know you, will pour out all sorts of things to you. I've had all the mothers dying, fathers with cancer, the boy who's had trouble with his flat, and the girl with trouble with her boy-friend – and even the boy who was organising supper for his pals wanting to know how much minced beef he needed!'

There is one last observation or issue which we wish to repeat. Teaching is often an isolated task conducted in the privacy of classrooms, unobserved, and frequently little discussed. Some teachers, as we have shown, disliked any move to make their task more public but once this

barrier of privacy had been breached – as it had in some areas of the schemes – there were rewards to be gained by participating teachers. A group of teachers sharing a common scheme can represent a considerable source of support and enthusiasm. For many of the teachers, involvement in a successful scheme was felt to be a source of motivation or, perhaps in some cases, re-motivation, at a time when material incentives were not readily available.

Chapter 7

Issues for college managers

By the term 'managers' we mean here all those in further education institutions above the level of course organiser who have responsibility for the institution as a whole or for a department, school or faculty within it. Much of what this report says about teachers and students on open learning schemes will, it is hoped, also be relevant to those college managers. To acknowledge some of the issues and perceptions that have been discussed may permit potential problems to be anticipated, solved or, at least, ameliorated. In the rest of this section we are concerned specifically with issues of management and organisation of open learning schemes, as identified in the three project centres.

ORIGINS AND EARLY GROWTH OF SCHEMES

Morrish (1976) sums up the lot of an innovator:

> 'Innovators are rarely popular people: their merchandise is concerned usually with the untried, and they tend to be regarded as individuals who are opposed on principle to the present order of things, but who have nothing really solid and demonstrably certain to supplant it. Inevitably they have more enemies than friends; their enemies are represented by those whose profit derives from the status quo, and their friends are more often lukewarm and guarded than really supportive and wholehearted, whilst they believe hopefully that in some way they will probably benefit from the new order.'

It is a pessimistic account which was not confirmed in all its details by the three schemes which we studied. There are nevertheless many elements of truth in it, for significant innovation in FE colleges is not easy. Tradition, administrative systems, organisational structures and certain concepts of teachers' professionalism — all of them acted, to some extent, against the establishment of the open learning schemes. The more parts of the organisation that were affected and the more radical the proposed schemes, the stronger that action became. What is more interesting, perhaps, is how the schemes became established and the difficulties and supports which they encountered.

Starting the schemes

All the schemes which were studied during the project had their origins in decisions of senior college management. In one case it was decided to delegate the planning, development and oversight of the scheme to a department, which was where it stayed. In another case the principal, after assigning responsibility for the scheme to a member of the college staff, nevertheless kept a protective eye on it:

> 'We needed money for a part-time teacher for that same evening. I phoned (X) at lunch-time, but still the contract had not been signed. Later, at 3.30 pm, I had a phone message to say that there would be no money, so in desperation I phoned the principal — by 3.45 pm there was money, and the part-time teacher could be paid.'

In another scheme the vice principal acted as the stimulus for the scheme, and took a leading part in its establishment and early operation. Such powerful support lends drive and credibility to a scheme, but raises a problem of deciding at what stage of its development so central a figure can hand over its conduct to other staff.

At a further stage of development of one of the schemes, the force for change came from a particular member of staff able to command the professional respect of his immediate colleagues. Despite his political ability and commitment, this member of staff still faced a degree of opposition from others who were not directly involved in the scheme. He needed the support of the departmental head involved. This support was decisive, as another head of department observed:

> 'There was a tremendous struggle with some of the staff when it was set up — mind, it's easier now (. . .) But in spite of resistance, there's no going back — you either move forward, or fall behind. At the beginning, (the teacher) was very important. But (the HoD) was also committed to the idea, and if the HoD is keen, it takes away a lot of problems.'

This degree of commitment to the scheme involved, and the recognition of the importance of keeping the process of adaptation going forward seemed to be common factors across the schemes. In all of them, the determination to start the scheme despite the problems was very strong; in fact there was the feeling among the staff involved that, if all the possible problems were considered, no scheme would ever start.

> 'Yes, it's no good saying we won't start until we're fully planned; you're not going to start. It's the same with the admin. If you say "The admin. problems are pretty horrendous, I don't know how we're going to overcome them, and we're better sorting them out first" — then you're never going to start anything. You have to admit that we don't

know how the hell we're going to do it, but we're going to get on and do it.'

Among many of the staff involved in the three schemes, as we have shown, there appeared to be a degree of educational idealism of commitment to openness of learning. This was not necessarily the origin of the schemes, for there was some sort of external stimulus to all of them. For example:

> 'There was pressure from the LEA to take away full-time O and A level classes — they were thinking of tertiary. So (the member of staff) decided upon (our scheme) to build up the number of part-time students to make up the work for staff if full-time teaching declined.'

But the response to this external stimulus took on a certain form or character, and it was one that managers and committed staff found no difficulty in sharing. In talking of history, Herbert Butterfield used to differentiate between the occasion of a war (the event that sparked it) and the causes of the war. The former is historically of marginal importance, while the latter are highly significant. Perhaps in the successful innovation the same is true; whatever the nature of the external threat or stimulus, what is significant for success is the nature of the response.

The conviction that the educational direction of an open learning scheme was 'right' seemed important to managers also in enabling them to make the important judgements in determining the character of the scheme. Whether the view was that the proposed scheme fitted the general character of a college's provision for its community, or that students should be treated as adults, such judgements seemed to be of vital importance at the early stage of establishment. For example:

> 'The students don't have to attend — I suppose that's a value judgement about education we made. As a result there's a fair amount of self-selection in the system. This causes problems in the management information we need about numbers and attendance — but it's back to the dilemma of how far to push them or free them (the students).'

Commitment to a general direction may be not only more practicable then the advancement of detailed ideas about a scheme, but also more useful in carrying managers and teachers through the period of uncertainty when ideas are being formulated more precisely through experience.

Involving staff

Another important decision at the early stages of a scheme is the choice of key staff. Some managers may wish to lead the innovation personally, while others may wish to support a scheme from a more detached position. Both approaches sooner or late face the same problem — that of choosing

members of staff to set up the scheme, with the added difficulty for the former of having to time the handover, and to manage some degree of distancing. The qualities required of a member of staff who is to establish a scheme may be different from those required to work in it. Colleges can abound with personal rivalries and accusations of bandwagons. What seemed significant in certain of the project schemes was the central importance of somebody who was respected by his or her professional peers, was not perceived as personally over-ambitious, and who adopted a neutral position in the arena of college politics. Too 'strong' a personality, in college rather than personal terms, may provoke an equally strong reaction, or even opposition. In one scheme, one protagonist said of the other key person:

> 'I've got a lot of time for (X); we've been friends and colleagues for years. He's been ploughing a lone furrow for a long time.'

This particular member of staff had done so much in setting up the scheme by

> 'a lot of preliminary lobbying of key people — not on a hierarchical basis, but people who had influence, or who were leaders of opinion, in and outside college.'

He would be the first to acknowledge that he thoroughly enjoyed, and was adept in, his political role; he would acknowledge too that he attracted 'a fair amount of flak'. This combination of a political facilitator and a constructive neutral seems to have done much to make the scheme a success. In many colleges such a happy choice is not available; frequently, too, the staff choose themselves as the originators of schemes. But, if managers are to make the best of staff at this decisive stage of the scheme, advice about tactics and role will be very important.

Administrative support

Another aspect of early support, which can appear relatively unimportant but which is highly significant to the teacher, is the provision of fairly low-level administrative support. Most open learning schemes demand a greater degree of administrative/secretarial support than conventional courses — partly because an adequate system has already been developed for the traditional, but mainly because of the essential character of open learning schemes. Seemingly trivial matters like easy access to a telephone, the typing of letters and a reliable system for ensuring the delivery of messages from students make a disproportionate difference to the task of teachers setting up or running open learning schemes. The existence of such facilities enables teachers to concentrate upon contact with students, the essence of any scheme; their absence, besides

hampering teachers' performance, can in some circumstances be taken as a sign of a lack of commitment of the college's senior managers.

A number of managerial decisions have to be taken as a scheme establishes itself and, probably, grows. Who is to staff it? By what efficiency criteria is it to be judged? By what means are the scheme and the existing college procedures to be reconciled?

Staffing the schemes

The teachers involved in the innovatory stages of the schemes which we observed were usually self-selected, and it will often be the case that committed staff come forward to set the scheme up. As the scheme expands less committed teachers will have to join it and managers may need to select them with some care. As earlier sections of this report illustrate it is likely that some teachers, however competent in a traditional classroom, will not make a happy transfer to open learning. There can also be material reasons:

> 'We've gone in on a goodwill basis, but now we've got to put it on a sounder basis or it will fall flat.'

Senior managers of some of the three schemes preferred to recruit part-time teachers, chosen for their commitment to the scheme, rather that to coerce full-time teachers into situations in which they felt uncomfortable. But staff who are not at first committed to a scheme may need to be won over to effective participation in it. All three schemes included a significant number of staff who had been persuaded to join them. Managers have the power to influence this sort of decision in indirect ways, as well as in the more obvious fashion. One factor in several teachers' decisions was the amount of 'hassle' involved in the new as compared with the traditional. The absence of the minor support facilities mentioned earlier signaled added difficulties in the performance of their tasks. Less tangible but more significant was the status or esteem that was afforded the scheme and this was largely a function of the status of the individuals involved and the recognition that was given by them by senior college or departmental managers. One factor in the successful assimilation of new staff appeared to be the existence (or otherwise) of a cohesive group of staff which they were able to join and from which they could receive support. The establishment or encouragement of such a group may be an important managerial task to consider.

Accounting for resources

Other important influences on the decisions about when and how to move the innovation into the college structure are the demands which may arise for its resource accountability and its integration into the college administrative system. Explicitly or implicitly, senior managers in the project colleges decided not to press too hard in the early years of the schemes for the application of standard accounting procedures for student numbers and staff loads. They believed that to do otherwise could disable or close the schemes. Records of individual student progress may have been kept to support the tutorial work, but, in the early stages of the schemes, aggregated information — ie. management information — on student numbers and progress was less commonly available. The absence of such a system was often seen as an advantage:

> 'We've had no pressure in college over things like that (records); we've been left to get on with the job. In things like this you have to try to overcome the bureaucracy — put it on one side and get on with the scheme, and sort out the bureaucracy afterwards, but don't let the problems stop you.'

That same member of staff went on to say that:

> 'There's no problem in getting all the right information now the scheme's running -- it's just a question of getting on and doing it.'

'Getting on and doing it', however, can be a complex and time-consuming task if initially there had been no system at all. Further, a college which sets up a scheme in the middle 1980s will find a number of precedents available when it comes to establish a management information system, although there may still be dangers in the early adoption of a system from another institution. (Birch and Latcham (1984) give an extended review of resource management in open learning schemes.)

In addition to their own potential demands for accountability, the senior managers were also liable to be called to account by the LEA, whose own procedures (together with those of the DES) may have been inappropriate for monitoring schemes of open learning. These comments by senior managers were typical.

> 'There's a need for our LEA to adjust their accounting methods to deal with open learning developments — as the moment they turn a blind eye.'

> 'We don't worry about "hows" too much, especially with the situation in a state of flux. There's a lot of new, unregistered work going on, and the LEA will just have to deal with it.'

Most of them took the view — and the risk — that educational judgements should have priority over accounting criteria, and that

procedures for financial administration should be derived from the nature of the scheme, not imposed upon it. Some believed that part of the work that was being done within the scheme might even be impossible to account for:

> 'There are all sorts of problems of accounting in traditional terms. How do you account for a course for which there's no time slot, and for those people who just pop in off the street to make use of the scheme? It's also used by school students in their free periods!'

The possibility of devising a system to account for such a clientele was not finally denied; what they were doubtful about was the relative benefit of doing so.

Location in the college

Decisions about accounting procedures and administrative systems may eventually lead to a decision on the permanent location of the scheme within the college structure. The schemes studied by the project gave at first a range of locations: within one department, across departments, within a matrix. The emergence of a group of staff with a shared interest in the open learning provision (arguably a desirable state of affairs for any curriculum) occurred more easily in the departmental scheme than in the other two. Staff met routinely every working day, the allocation of Burnham points (which are related to student-hours) posed no problem. With an inter-departmental or other cross-college scheme, resistance to its development was less likely to be mounted if the Burnham points earned by the open learning students were returned to the home departments of the individual lecturers. Co-ordination of the scheme and the development of a course team were nevertheless difficult when interests and responsibilities were likely to conflict. A strong central influence would be necessary to achieve them, and it is worth recording that, after the mergers and re-organisations which took place during the life of the project, the resultant colleges are either planning to set up their open learning schemes as separate organisational areas or have already done so.

PART IV: CONCLUSIONS

We explained in Part I that the project was not of the kind which leads to specific recommendations in practice. Neither is this kind of report easily summarised. To sum up the complexity of the teacher's role in an open learning scheme by saying simply that it was varied and that the variety could cause some difficulties of adjustment (for example), would be to miss the important complexities of experience which we have tried to reveal. Our conclusions, therefore, take the form of questions which should be considered by teachers and managers who are thinking of starting an open learning scheme or of developing an existing one. The point of each question is drawn from the experience of participants in the three colleges we studied, as reported in Parts II and III, and it is our belief that, if the questions were used as an agenda for internal college discussions, they would reveal many of the key issues arising from the establishment and operation of schemes of open learning.
This part has two short sections:

Chapter 8 **Questions for teachers**
Chapter 9 **Questions for managers**

Questions for teachers

GETTING INVOLVED

1 Why would you WISH (OR NOT WISH) TO BECOME INVOLVED in an open learning scheme?

(a) How **appropriate** would it be for you subject and your students?

(b) To what extent would the **personal development** of your students be assisted?

(c) How helpful would the scheme be in maintaining or increasing your **student numbers,**including numbers on option courses?

(d) How many **new students** might you be able to reach? (Would you be able to find the 'missed population'?)

(e) How attractive to you is the idea of a **more open and collaborative relationship** with your colleagues?

(f) To what extent would involvement **help your career?**

2 What SUPPORT FOR THE SCHEME might be forthcoming?

(a) How many colleagues would you be able to **persuade to join you**?

(b) If there is **opposition or criticism**, how would you respond to it?

(c) How much **extra work** would be needed to set the scheme up? How much would you be prepared to do?

(d) What **extra resources** would be needed (materials, accommodation, administrative and academic staff time, etc.)? How likely is it that the institution will provide them?

BEING INVOLVED

3 Will the INCREASED PUBLICITY of teaching give you pleasure or problems?

(a) Will you mind being unable to answer a **student's** unexpected questions?

(b) Will you welcome or resent having to **ask a colleague for help** in answering a student's question?

4 What EXTRA SKILLS will be required of you? If you have not already acquired them, how will you do so?

(a) Do you regard the setting of **assessed work** to be an exercise in student labeling or in a student learning? If the former, how far will you be able to become a diagnostician and commentator? If the latter, how will you cope with the occasional need to fail a student – if, as in an open learning scheme, you may know the student individually very well?

(b) How far does the scheme rely upon high quality **learning materials**? How far can you use materials already available? Do you have the skills and time to improve or supplement existing materials or to write new ones?

5 If you have to SHARE OR RELINQUISH CONTROL over the pace and sequence of student learning, will it be a pleasure to you or a problem?

(a) Do you **prefer to run individual tutorials, group tutorials or a taught class?**

(b) How will you acquire **the skills necessary** to run individual or group tutorials, if you do not already have them?

6 How will you feel about the REDUCED PERSONAL DISTANCE between you and individual students?

(a) What areas of student difficulty do you consider to be the **proper responsibility of a teacher?** How will you respond if the students attempt to introduce you to other areas?

(b) How will you decide **when to intervene** in a student's exercise of autonomy?

(c) To what extent do you wish to **know your students as individuals**? If the extent is only limited, how will you signal the distinction to the students?

Questions for college managers

PURPOSE AND MOTIVE

1 What are your REASONS for wishing to set up an open learning scheme?

(a) Do you wish to reach **new sections of the community**?

(b) Is it your intention to **counteract declining enrolments** or to maintain option courses with low numbers?

(c) Is the reason to provide a **different, and better, curriculum process**? To achieve different objectives (eg. those relating to student autonomy)?

(d) Is the scheme intended to **invigorate teaching staff**?

2 Using the answers to Questions 1(a)-(d), what should be the NATURE AND SCALE of the scheme?

(a) Should it be a **bolt-on addition** for a missed student population?

(b) Will it involve students on **minor courses or mainstream courses**?

(c) Is it to be a **self-contained** open learning scheme or a first step towards making the whole provision of the college more flexible?

SETTING IT UP

3 How much a SUPPORT will your proposals attract?

(a) Will other members of the college staff see the **reasons** in the same way as you do?

(b) What **sources of argument, persuasion or coercion** do you have access to?

(c) What **procedures, formal and informal**, would you be advised to follow in order to establish the scheme?

4 Who is likely to RESIST the introduction of the open learning scheme?

(a) How **well-founded** will the resistance be?

(b) How **significant** will the resistance be?

(c) How (if appropriate) may the resistance be **overcome**?

5 What is your TIMETABLE for setting up the scheme?

(a) **How adequate** will that time period seem to managerial, teaching and support staff?

6 Will the proposed scheme have any consequences for THE WAY THE COLLEGE IS ORGANISED?

(a) Who will **co-ordinate** the scheme? An individual (from which department)? A cross-college unit?

(b) If the college has a departmental structure, will the scheme(s) be located entirely within departments or will there need to be some **inter-departmental co-operation**?

(c) Will the **administrative staff** have to undertake new tasks? How will they learn how to do so?

(d) Do you have the **influence** needed to bring about these changes?

7 What will be your own PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT in the scheme?

(a) Will you **lead, co-ordinate, encourage** . . . ?

(b) **Who will succeed you in the role**?

8 WHICH STAFF ARE ENTHUSIASTIC about the scheme or could become so?

(a) Will you be able to **bring them into the scheme**?

(b) Will you expect them to work, in effect, **unpaid overtime** when developing the scheme?

(c) What **resources** will you be able to make available to the development? Will they be adequate?

STAFF AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

9 What qualities will be required of STAFF WHO JOIN THE SCHEME at a later stage?

(a) Who will **select the staff**? By what **criteria and process**?

(b) What **support** will be offered to staff who join the scheme?

(c) How can an **effective course team** be helped to emerge?

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

10 What ACCOUNTING PROCEDURES will you use for the scheme?

(a) Will **standard LEA/DES accounting procedures** for staff and student hours be appropriate to the scheme? From what point in the scheme's development?

(b) What **other accounting procedures** can you develop or adopt which will be acceptable within and outside the college?

(c) If the initial procedures are rather loose, how will you introduce **more specific controls** at subsequent stages of the scheme without damaging staff commitment?

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

11 How will you incorporate in your scheme some means of EVALUATING ITS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?

(a) Who will **plan the evaluation**?

(b) Who will **carry it out**?

(c) At **which points**?

(d) **For whom**?

12 How could you introduce a GENUINELY FLEXIBLE SCHEME, i.e. one which removes constraints on more than just the learning process?

REFERENCES

Birch, D & J Latcham (1984) **Managing open learning.** Blagdon, Further Education Staff College.

Council for Educational Technology (1980) **Open learning systems in further education and training: a discussion of the issues and recommendations to Government.** A consultative document. CET.

Further Education Unit (1983) **Flexible learning opportunities.** FEU.

Further Education Unit (1985) **The experience of open learning.** A summary document. Longmans.

Lewis, R (1980) **Counselling in open learning — a case study.** Cambridge, National Extension College.

Lewis, R (1981a) **How to tutor in an open learning scheme.** (Self-study version.) Council for Educational Technology.

Lewis, R (1981b) **How to tutor with NEC.** Cambridge. National Extension College.

Manpower Services Commission (1981) **An 'Open Tech' Programme. A consultative document.** MSC.

Morrish, I (1976) **Aspects of educational change.** George Allen & Unwin.

Norris, N (*ed*) (1980) **Theory in practice. SAFARI Interim Papers 2.** Norwich. CARE, University of East Anglia.

Sands, T R & D C Spencer (1979) **Bradford College mathematics workshop.** (Information Bank Paper: 1368) Blagdon. Further Education Staff College.

Simons, H (*ed*) (1980) **Towards a science of the singular.** Norwich. CARE, University of East Anglia.

Taylor, E, A Morgan & G Gibbs (1981) **Students' orientations to study.** Paper to the 5th International Conference on Higher Education, University of Lancaster.